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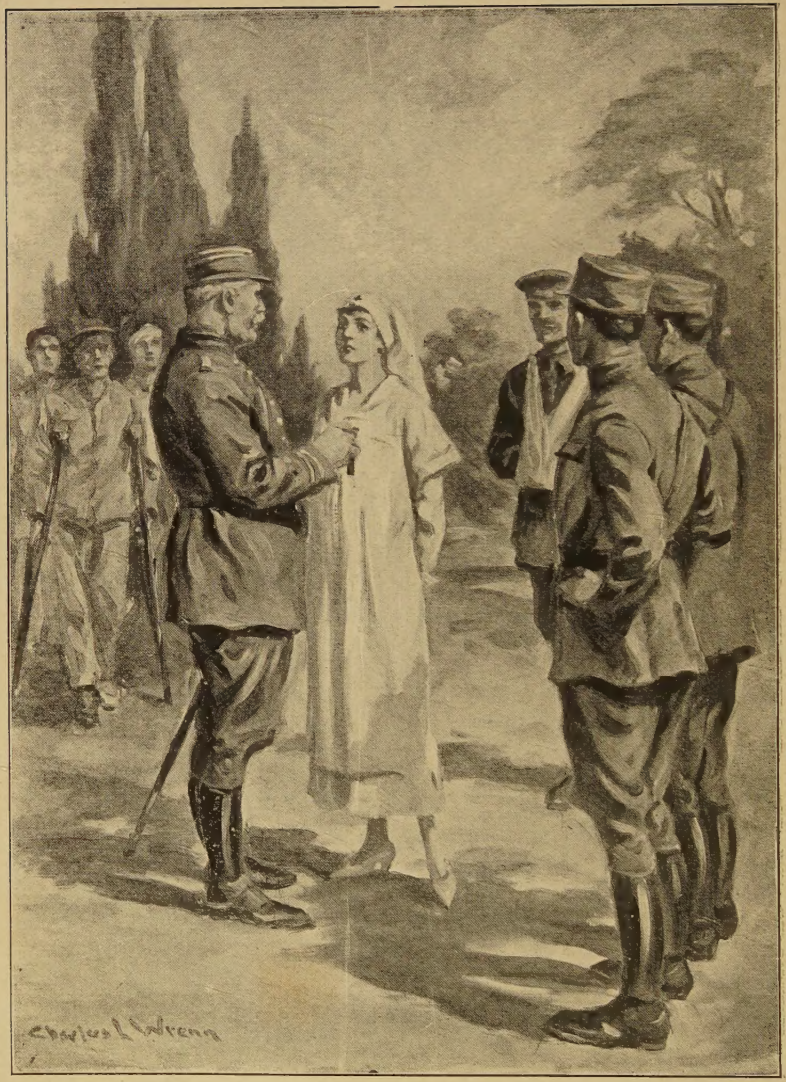

"The General pinned it reverently on the front of Valerie's dress"

(*Page 138*) *Frontispiece*

VALERIE DUVAL

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

BY

MARTHA TRENT

ILLUSTRATED BY

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VALERIE DUVAL

CHAPTER I

THE DUVALS

"VALERIE, Valerie, the Americans are here. Come quick!" Pierre Duval hurried, as fast as his crutches would permit, down the garden path. He was a fair-haired boy a little over seventeen, with big wistful blue eyes and a delicate face that contrasted oddly with his misshapen body.

He paused halfway to the gate to shout again, "Valerie, do you hear me? Come!"

"In a minute; don't be so impatient," a laughing voice answered his, and a face appeared at one of the dormer windows above him.

Valerie was Pierre's younger sister, and his direct opposite. Her hair was dark, and her eyes had none of his wistfulness. Instead, they flashed

a challenge to the whole world and indicated her dauntless spirit. The energy of her lithe, strong body showed in her quick movements.

The simple village folk of Vinon, when they saw the two together, often shook their heads in sympathy for Madame Duval, and wondered why the good God had seen fit to give the girl the looks of a boy, and the boy the wistful eyes and sensitive features of a girl.

"I am not impatient," Pierre replied, looking up at his sister, "but you are such a slow poke, it takes a charge of dynamite to get you started. Are you coming?"

"Yes, yes, yes." The head disappeared from the window, and Valerie was soon on the path beside her brother.

"Here I am,—and now where are the Americans?" she demanded. "I don't see them."

"Come with me." Pierre led her to the gate and pointed down the hill.

The Duvals' house and farm was a little way out of the village and high on the crest of a hill; a winding road led up to it. As Pierre and Va-

lerie looked they saw three men coming towards them.

"Two are Americans, and one is a Frenchman. He will be the interpreter, I suppose," Pierre laughed; "as if we need an interpreter to understand English!"

Valerie nodded. "He will have a dusty walk for nothing, poor little man, but why are there only two Americans? I thought from the way you shouted that the whole army had come."

"Simpleton, an army does not suddenly arrive in a village at nine in the morning, and mark time in the square until their sleeping quarters are ready. Officers come first and arrange for the billets," Pierre explained. "Even I, a worthless cripple, know that."

Valerie saw the hurt look deepen in her brother's eyes and hastened to change the subject.

"If we are to billet American troops," she said, "I think I had better go and find Mama. Do you know where she is?"

"Yes, in the dairy trying to teach Lizette how to make butter; and grandpapa is in the orchard.

If he sees the officers first he will offer to house the whole regiment."

Valerie laughed heartily. "You are right, I must fly to Mama." She hurried off, and Pierre rested his crutches against the hedge and waited.

When the three officers reached the gate, he stood as straight as he could and gave the military salute. The American officers returned it gravely, and the French interpreter stepped forward.

"Good morning, Monsieur Duval," he said politely, "may I present to you Captain Webb and Lieutenant Carey of the American Army. They have come to interview Madame, your mother, to ask her if she will be good enough to house some of their men."

Pierre let him finish without interrupting him, then he replied in English.

"It is an honor to meet you, sir," he saluted first the Captain and then the Lieutenant. "My mother will be here at once. Won't you step inside?" He pushed open the gate.

"Well, here's a piece of luck," Captain Webb

laughed. "Where did you learn to speak English?"

"My grandmother was an American, sir," Pierre replied proudly.

"Good enough. That's like finding an old friend," Lieutenant Carey exclaimed, just as Madame Duval and Valerie appeared around the corner of the house.

They came to attention at once and saluted.

"You will not need me, I take it, Madame," the little Frenchman bowed and stepped to one side. "Your son tells us that you speak English."

Madame Duval smiled and nodded. She was a tall, capable-looking woman with a decided, but gracious manner. She was fair like her son, but her eyes had the same expression as her daughter's.

"Thank you, Monsieur, I think I can manage without you." She turned to the Captain. "What can I do for you? My place is, of course, at your disposal. We've three bedrooms to spare at the house, and the barn is empty. The Government took our last horse not long ago. The barn

is not very comfortable, but it's dry." She smiled and led the way towards the house. Valerie went ahead to open the door.

"Did you say it was tough luck to have to arrange for billets?" Captain Webb inquired in an aside to his companion. "Well here's where I show you how easy it is."

Lieutenant Carey nodded in satisfaction.

"You don't know how good it sounds to hear English again, Madame," Captain Webb said as they walked towards the house.

"I can imagine," Madame laughed. "Ours, I'm afraid, is a little rusty, we speak so seldom. My father-in-law, Monsieur Duval, who lives with us, does not understand it, and so we speak French entirely among ourselves; but I try to make the children read English as much as possible."

She turned to Valerie.

"This is my daughter, Captain Webb."

Valerie held out her hand.

"How do you do, Captain," she said shyly.

"Delighted, I'm sure," the Captain replied, "may I present Lieutenant Carey?"

"Valerie, take Lieutenant Carey around and show him the barn, will you—you and Pierre?" her mother suggested; "perhaps that will save time, and I know you want to do that," she smiled at the Captain. "I will show you the rooms."

She entered the broad doorway, and the Captain followed her up the narrow flight of stairs.

The Duvals' house was a large one, a low rambling building with big spacious rooms, comfortable, but not at all pretentious.

Valerie lead the way to the barn.

"It is fun having you here," she said to Lieutenant Carey, "we see so few soldiers."

"Well, we can certainly fix that for you by to-night," the Lieutenant replied. "You'll see so many that you'll get tired of us."

"I don't think so," Valerie shook her head.

"The only thing we get tired of, is doing the same thing day after day," Pierre added. "France is at war, but up here on our hill we go on living the same as ever."

Lieutenant Carey was quick to notice the sad note in his voice. "Well, you'll have plenty to do

to-morrow," he replied cheerfully. "You'll have to act as interpreter for the whole regiment."

"Here's the barn," Valerie pushed open the big sliding door before Lieutenant Carey could help her. "Will it suit?" she asked, smiling.

"I should say so. Why, it's a wonderful find. The boys will all be scrapping over who will stay here. Let's see the floor space." And the Lieutenant looked about him and nodded in approval.

"And there's a loft upstairs," Pierre added, pointing to the ladder.

"Thirty men easily, and in case some of the places in the village won't do, we can put in more. There, that's fine, now let's go back to the house." The Lieutenant wrote down something in a note book.

"Will you stay here?" Pierre inquired. "At our house I mean?" he added eagerly.

"I hope so," Lieutenant Carey replied. "I most certainly hope so,—it's the only comfortable spot I've seen since I arrived in France, and I'd hate to think I was not going to enjoy it personally."

Pierre's face brightened. "I was afraid you would choose the Inn," he said.

When they reached the front of the house, Madame Duval and the Captain were waiting for them. Lieutenant Carey reported and they turned to leave.

"I hope we will not bother you very much," the Captain said. "You've been awfully good about it, but I know it must be a bother to have an army descend upon you, particularly when you are so busy. Do you run the farm yourself?"

Madame Duval nodded.

"Yes, Captain Webb, I do," she replied; "and I have run it ever since the death of my husband ten years ago. It is not very difficult in peace times when there are plenty to help, but it is hard just now; I have no one but girls and old women to work. Our France has called even the boys."

Captain Webb nodded. "I know," he said quietly.

Valerie glanced quickly at her mother, a sudden look of apprehension in her eyes. But Madame

Duval did not see it, she was shaking hands with Lieutenant Carey.

"We will see you both to-night, I hope?" she inquired, "you say the regiment will arrive sometime this afternoon."

The Captain nodded. "Oh, you'll see us," he laughed. "Nothing but sudden death, or an order from the Colonel will stop us. You see, we've decided to use the little Inn for Headquarters, because it's near the station, you understand—but the Colonel may have something to say on the subject, if he sees your house first."

"We hope he won't," Madame replied graciously, "we will be very disappointed if you don't return to us."

The officers saluted, and with the interpreter started back on their way to the village. Pierre followed them to the garden gate, but Valerie, once their backs were turned, hurried into the house and flew up the stairs into her room. From the big fourposted bed she snatched up a number of garments, rolled them hastily into a bundle, and hid them in the third drawer of her dresser.

"Phew, that was a narrow escape!" she said when the drawer was tight shut. "Thank goodness I remembered to shut my door when Pierre called."

CHAPTER II

THE AMERICANS

AT three o'clock that afternoon the little village of Vinon was a scene of bustle and confusion. The market-place was filled with laughing, jostling soldiers, and the inhabitants were rushing about excitedly. From the little town hall, an old building that had witnessed the arrival and departure of many troops, the tricolor and the stars and stripes floated side by side.

Not since the fifth day of August three years before, when the tocsin had sounded the call to arms had the people been so roused. They cheered the American troops as they had cheered their own boys; flowers were thrown from the windows of the little cottages, and four very old men, all that were left of the band, played the splendid strain of the Marseillaise. The Burgomaster made a

short, but enthusiastic welcome speech that lost a little in its hasty translation by the interpreter.

The Americans viewed the setting prepared for them, and grinned good-naturedly. They were a little embarrassed at so much demonstration.

A small basket cart, drawn by a fat little donkey stood at one side of the square, a little to the right of the town hall. In it were Pierre, his eyes bright with excitement, Valerie, and a little, thin old gentleman with snow-white hair, Monsieur Duval. He wore three medals on his worn black coat, and his hands trembled as he passed his cigarette case among the soldiers.

When the Mayor's speech was over, the men were ordered to their billets, and again the good people of Vinon bustled about, this time in their own cottages, to make everything ready to receive their guests.

Pierre watched the Colonel, followed by his staff, go into the Inn, and sighed with relief.

"If he will only stay there," he said, "we can be sure of our officers returning to us."

"There's Lieutenant Carey now," Valerie ex-

claimed, "and oh, do look at that giant he has with him!"

"He sees us," Pierre cried eagerly. "See, he is coming."

A lane opened in the crowd of olive-drab uniforms, and the lieutenant, followed by the "giant," came towards the cart.

"Well, here we are again," he laughed as he shook Pierre's hand, "and I think it's safe to say that we will be with you."

"This is Lieutenant Fielding, who is to share our good luck with us."

"Oh, Monsieur, you are so big!" Valerie murmured, forgetting herself for the moment, as she looked at the broad-shouldered man before her. Then she blushed. "I beg your pardon, I did not mean to be rude," she exclaimed.

"This is my grandfather, Monsieur Duval."

The old gentleman saluted gravely and replied in French. Valerie did her best to interpret his long sentence, then Captain Webb joined them, and the formalities were repeated.

Lieutenant Carey left to lead the men who were

billeted in the Duvals' barn, up the hill, but Captain Webb and Lieutenant Fielding waited beside the donkey cart. They saw the men form into line, and at a command from Lieutenant Carey start off. Pierre picked up the reins, and the donkey, after a little coaxing, followed, the two officers keeping up with his slow pace, one on either side of the cart.

In a few hours the men had made themselves quite at home on the Duval farm. The three officers, their rooms in order, smoked contentedly on the brick terrace, while the privates, with the exception of the unfortunate ones chosen for kitchen duty, lounged on the grassy slope of the hill and watched the sun set behind the church tower in the village below.

Pierre, even in so short a time, had transferred his allegiance from the officers to the men. He sat on the ground beside them and watched them curiously.

"What are you thinking about, Bud?" a big, tall Westerner inquired good-naturedly.

Pierre shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing

much," he replied sighing, but the expression of envy in his eyes, as he looked at the big men about him, made an explanation of his thoughts unnecessary.

The men were silent. Some of them glanced out of the corner of their eyes at Pierre's twisted legs and felt suddenly uncomfortable.

"Sing," Pierre said at last, "that funny song you were singing in the square to-day, the one about 'get your gun and run.' "

The men laughed, and one of them struck up the familiar tune of "Over There."

On the terrace the officers joined in, and old Monsieur Duval kept time on the floor with his heavy cane. In the kitchen Valerie and her mother smiled as they worked. They were preparing their supper. Madame had insisted that her guests join them at table, and was making extra dishes especially for them. She paused long enough to glance out of the window at the group on the lawn.

"Pierre is in the very center of them," she laughed to Valerie.

"Poor Pierre, it is so hard for him!" Valerie replied. "I do hope he won't have another of those blue fits. Sometimes I think if he would only say things—or get very angry, perhaps, instead of just sitting still and looking with those sad eyes, I wouldn't mind so much."

"I know," her mother nodded, "he is very patient. I do hope grandpapa does not start to talk to-night. When he begins about the bravery of the Duvals, I can see how it hurts Pierre to listen."

"Don't worry," Valerie laughed. "I promise to talk so much that he won't get in a word."

The song outside stopped, and they went on with their work.

Dinner was soon ready, and during the meal Monsieur Duval was very quiet. Pierre did most of the talking. He asked questions mostly about the men he had just left.

"Who is that great big one?" he asked Captain Webb. "He is, I think, almost bigger than you are." He looked at Lieutenant Fielding and smiled. "And you know Valerie called you a giant."

"Oh, Pierre, how mean you are!" Valerie protested in French.

They all laughed at her embarrassment, Fielding most of all, and Captain Webb replied: "I think you must mean Jim Goodw... He was a baseball player before he joined the Army."

"Baseball. Oh, is that your American game?" Pierre inquired. "I have read of it in American books."

"Well, it's one of them," Captain Webb smiled. "Do you know how to play it?"

"No," Pierre shook his head. "I understand English cricket, but, of course, I don't play *anything*."

"Well, if you can understand cricket," Lieutenant Carey interrupted hurriedly, "you can do more than I can. Tell you what we'll do,—tomorrow I'll explain baseball to you, and you explain cricket to me. Is it a go?"

"Oh, yes, of course." Pierre was outwardly delighted at the idea.

The talk drifted pleasantly to other subjects, and it was not until supper was over and they were

all sitting before the small fire that the cool fall night made necessary, that Monsieur Duval spoke, Valerie acting as interpreter.

"It is a rare privilege to see soldiers again around our ...," he began in his quivering voice. "It is many years ago that I sat here with my two brothers before the war—many years," he sighed.

After a pause Lieutenant Fielding pointed to the medals he wore and asked what they were. The old gentleman was only too glad to explain them, and describe how, during the Franco-Prussian war, he had been a gay and brave French soldier. One story led to another, and the American officers were greatly interested.

"The Duvals are a family of fighters, aren't they?" the Captain asked.

"Indeed yes," Monsieur Duval replied proudly. when Valerie had translated for him. "We are not a great family, but we are a very old family, and we have always been loyal sons to France. This, alas, is the first time she has ever called, that a Duval has not answered, but this time there is no one to go."

"Grandpapa can't get used to being old," Valerie explained. "He says he would like to fight again."

She could see her brother's eyes in the firelight, and she tried to make light of her grandfather's profound sigh, but Pierre would not let her.

"That is not truly what grandpapa said," he contradicted. "He said that this war was the first in which a Duval had not fought," he explained simply. "It is true; but when the call came three years ago there was only an old man and a cripple boy," he shrugged his shoulders. "Not much good either of us, eh, for soldiers?"

"Oh, come, seems to me the Duvals have done their share," Lieutenant Fielding tried to laugh, but failed miserably. In his big heart he was thinking none too kindly of the very thoughtless old gentleman sitting opposite him.

"But now that the Americans are here everything is going to be all right," Madame Duval exclaimed, getting up. "Come along children, it is bed time. We've work for to-morrow."

Pierre and Valerie obeyed at once. They said goodnight and lighted their candles from the fire and went upstairs.

When Valerie was alone in her room, she sat a long time before her mirror, thinking. The officers came up to their rooms, and after a while the house grew quiet. Then she heard a stealthy click, click on the stairs. She went over to the window and watched. As she expected she saw Pierre hobble slowly down to the garden path, and after a minute the faint strains of a flute came up to her. She caught the first few bars of the Marseillaise. Pierre was playing away his sorrows on his beloved instrument.

Valerie went over to her dresser and opened the third drawer. She looked long and earnestly at the bundle in it.

"Perhaps it will be necessary after all," she said.

CHAPTER III

PIERRE

"BALL two, strike two!"

"Strike? How do you make that out?"

A howl of protest rose from the side lines, and for a few minutes the game was suspended, while the players from both contesting teams surrounded the umpire and endeavored to point out his mistake. The umpire, however, refused to alter his decision. He was the company cook, and he was used to complaints.

"Ball two, strike two," he said calmly. "Go back to your bases or the game won't go on."

The men reluctantly returned, and Pierre's friend of the night before took his place in the pitcher's box. Then the umpire called "play ball," and the game began again.

It was Saturday afternoon, and the men from

the Duval farm had challenged the men from the village to a ball game. An even grassy field back of the barn had been converted into a diamond, and the stone wall that surrounded it made an excellent grandstand.

Lieutenant Carey was watching the match with interest, and explaining the plays as best he could to Pierre who sat beside him. Valerie and Lieutenant Fielding watched from across the field.

"But that was a ball, I am sure of it," Pierre said in dismay as he watched the man at the bat take his place. "Why do the men let that umpire decide?" he demanded. "They should fight."

Lieutenant Carey laughed. "That's one of the rules of baseball, son. If the umpire says it's a strike, a strike it is," he explained. "An umpire's more important in baseball than a General is in the Army; what he says goes."

"I see, but I should think he would be afraid. Me, I would not dare to contradict! What does the man in—how do you call it?—the pitcher's box —what does he say?"

"Oh, Goodwin agrees with the umpire. You

see, he pitched the ball and he'd much rather have it called a strike."

"Oh, well, then if he says it is a strike it must have been. I thought he was angry." Pierre's tone was mollified; he was changing his mind in favor of his hero.

The game continued. There were more discussions, more arguments with the umpire, but at last they reached the ninth inning. The score was a tie, and the Duval farm team were at bat in the last half. The bases were full with two men out. Pierre, once he realized the importance of the situation, was so excited that he cheered and called advice in rapid French.

Goodwin was at bat. The first ball was a foul, and the umpire called "strike one!"

"No, no, he hit it, I protest!" Pierre leaned forward excitedly, but no one paid any attention to him.

Goodwin let the next two balls go by, but the third he hit,—hit it so hard that his bat cracked open, and the ball went flying far beyond the grasp of the outfielders.

The excitement was great, the men cheered and shouted, and Pierre in his excitement slipped off the wall. He could not reach his crutches in time, and his poor paralyzed legs could not support him; he fell limply to the ground.

Lieutenant Carey sprang to help him, but Pierre waved him away.

"Please, please do not notice me," he begged. "I couldn't bear it, here before all these men."

Lieutenant Carey nodded in understanding, and Pierre tried pluckily to join again in the cheering. Valerie and Lieutenant Fielding were probably the only two who saw the tumble.

"He has grit, poor youngster," the Lieutenant said, "what a shame it is!"

"It is more of a shame than you think, Monsieur," Valerie replied. "He is so proud and his spirit is so great, I think sometimes he will go mad. You heard last night how my grandfather spoke. Well, every word he says burns into my poor Pierre's heart. Grandpapa is an old man, and of course he does not understand," she added by way of apology.

Lieutenant Fielding had thought, since the night before, that old Monsieur Duval should be kept quiet, even if a muzzle were necessary, but he did not say so. Instead he suggested a walk. The game was over and the men from the village were preparing to leave.

Valerie knew that Pierre would wait until they were all out of sight before he would attempt to get up.

"Very well," she agreed, "I will show you the woods up there as I promised. They are very lovely in the sunset, and you will tell me about America, as *you* promised. Are the girls very different over there from us?" she asked as they strolled slowly towards the woods.

"Not very," Lieutenant Fielding replied, "I guess girls are the same the world over. Of course, our girls are a little bit more independent than most French girls—I mean they do pretty much as they please."

"They are very brave, yes?" Valerie said eagerly.

"Oh, I don't know, it isn't exactly bravery, but they *do* things."

"Tell me what they do?" Valerie demanded.

Lieutenant Fielding laughed.

"I happened to be thinking of a certain girl when I said that," he explained. "She's Lieutenant Carey's sister, and her name is Helen, but most everybody that knows her calls her Missy."

"And is she very brave?" Valerie insisted.

"Well, she has a good deal of spunk, at least I think so, but then I'm partial, you see. She saved my life twice, and so of course I think she's just about all right."

"Tell me about it?"

"Well, I can't exactly. You see, you wouldn't understand unless you knew all about the West, and of course you don't; but here are the facts. One day two men—they happened to be acting for the German government—it was before we entered the war you know that this happened—"

Valerie nodded eagerly.

"Well, you see these men had decided to kill me.

They got me all right; I was unconscious and never would have waked up to what was going on, but Missy happened to overhear their little scheme and she held them up, both of them, mind you, at the point of a gun, until I came to."

"Oh!" Valerie drew a deep sigh of excitement, and her eyes sparkled. "She must be very splendid. Tell me about the next time?"

Lieutenant Fielding laughed and shook his head. "Missy would kill me if she could hear me," he protested.

"But why?"

"Oh, she isn't exactly fond of having us brag about her," he explained, "but she'll never know this trip, so what's the difference? The second time was after we had declared war. We were all going east to a camp—a whole train full of soldiers—and somehow Missy found out that a German was going to blow up a bridge we had to cross, so she told Captain Webb."

"Oh, did she know him too?" Valerie inquired.

"Oh, yes, she was visiting his cousin at the time it all happened," Lieutenant Fielding explained,

and continued his story: "They jumped into a car, and Webb had a fight with the German on the bridge. They both fell into the water, and Missy, instead of waiting to pull 'em out, drove down the road and stopped the train before it reached the bridge. Her brother and I were on it, you see."

"And Captain Webb?" Valerie stopped walking and waited.

"Oh, he swam ashore all right, but the German didn't," Lieutenant Fielding laughed. "Missy was badly hurt, her shoulder was broken, but she didn't seem to care, and now she's going to marry Captain Webb after the war," he finished.

Valerie regarded him for a full minute, then she asked suddenly, "Are you sorry?"

Lieutenant Fielding looked at her in surprise.

"Goodness no, why should I be? Webb's one of the finest men I know. I'm glad; so's Tom—that's Lieutenant Carey, you know."

Valerie nodded. "I would like to meet Missy," she said gravely, "only I would be ashamed; I have never done anything brave in my whole life."

"Nonsense, you haven't had a chance," Lieu-

tenant Fielding replied. "And as for seeing Missy, perhaps you will some day. She's in France now, you know, working in a hospital."

Valerie did not reply, but turned around and started back towards the house.

Just as they came out of the woods and reached the end of the garden they heard the notes of a flute.

"What's that?" Lieutenant Fielding stopped to listen.

Valerie put her finger to her lips. The music stopped and they heard muffled sobs.

"It is Pierre, I knew he would be sad again," Valerie whispered. "You go back to the house; I will stay with him."

"Sure I can't help? Perhaps I could cheer him up," Lieutenant Fielding offered, but Valerie shook her head.

"No, it is much better for you to go."

The Lieutenant nodded and tiptoed down the path.

When he was out of sight Valerie called: "Pierre, where are you, my dear?"

A voice from behind a big shrub answered her. Pierre was lying on the ground, his face buried in the grass, and his frail body shook with sobs.

"Valerie, little sister, I can't stand it," he cried, "to be like this among all those men."

"Has grandpapa been talking his foolishness again?" Valerie demanded.

"No, no," Pierre denied, "do not blame grandpapa, he is right in what he says, France at war and no Duval in the field. Ah, Valerie, if you had only been the boy with your splendid strong body, instead of me; or if we only had another brother, or our father had lived! It is not that I want to go myself, I am not silly enough even to think of that,—I would be content if there were some one else that could go in my place."

He buried his head in Valerie's lap and she stroked his fair hair gently and tried to comfort him.

"Perhaps we will find some one, little brother," she said softly, "who knows—come now, try to cheer up so that Mama will not see your red eyes."

Pierre sat up. "I am a selfish cry-baby," he

exclaimed, "and you are the brave one. It is as I said, you should have been the boy and I the girl."

"Oh, yes, I think I can see you in a pinafore, you great silly," Valerie teased, "and your hair tied with a pink ribbon, doing embroidery perhaps!"

Pierre had to laugh in spite of himself at the idea. He dried his eyes hurriedly and together they walked back to the house.

CHAPTER IV

FOR FRANCE

THAT night when every one had gone to bed Valerie took out the bundle from the third drawer of her dresser and unrolled it. There was a boy's suit of tan corduroy, a soft flannel shirt, a cap, and a heavy pair of boots.

She shook the suit out carefully and laid it over the back of a chair, then she walked over and sat down before the delicate gilt mirror that hung over her dressing-table. She nodded with approval at her reflection.

"I will go," she said aloud. "If they find me out, they can do no more than send me home."

She pushed her dark hair back from her forehead and twisted it into a tight knot at the back of her neck, then she turned her head and looked again into the mirror.

"I look just as much like a boy as Pierre, and

lots more like one than plenty of the boys who have left the village; and"—she paused a moment, a gleam of humor stole into her dark eyes, and the tense expression of her white face relaxed,—"it is a little comfort to me to know that I won't be altogether hideous."

She got up and tiptoed over to the door and listened. No one seemed to move in the house.

"Well, if I am going there is no need to waste time," she said aloud to herself. "Perhaps this chance has come to me just as the American girl's chance came to her. She was brave, but I will be braver, for—" she paused and looked proudly at an old miniature that hung above her bed,—"I am a Duval."

She crossed the room to a little work-table under the window and picked up a big pair of scissors. Their bright steel blades glistened in the candlelight. Valerie took them to her dressing table and sat down again before the mirror. Very slowly she undid the knot of hair. It was a heavy knot, and when it was down, the long coil reached below her waist. Then she picked up the scissors,

but she shuddered and put them down again hurriedly.

"I will dress first, then I will have the courage," she said, and went over to the suit of clothes.

She unhooked her dress slowly and pulled on the long trousers. They were much too big for her, and she had to roll them up around her ankles. Then she changed her soft slippers for the heavy shoes; she delayed a little over the lacing.

"I am a silly, vain girl after all," she exclaimed impatiently, and she returned once again to the dressing table. "I will do it now."

But in spite of her determination her hand refused to guide the scissors to her hair. Twice she lifted them only to put them back again on the table. She moved the candles impatiently nearer to the mirror, rested her chin in the palms of her hands and stared hard at her image.

Then from the garden below the notes from Pierre's flute came up to her through the open window. He was playing the Marseillaise. For the first few bars the words seemed to sing themselves with the music.

"Allons enfants de la patrie.

Le jour de gloire est arrivé."

Valerie threw back her head and listened, then without a tremor of hesitation she snatched up the scissors and began to cut hurriedly. The long strands of hair fell to the floor.

"There, now it is done!"

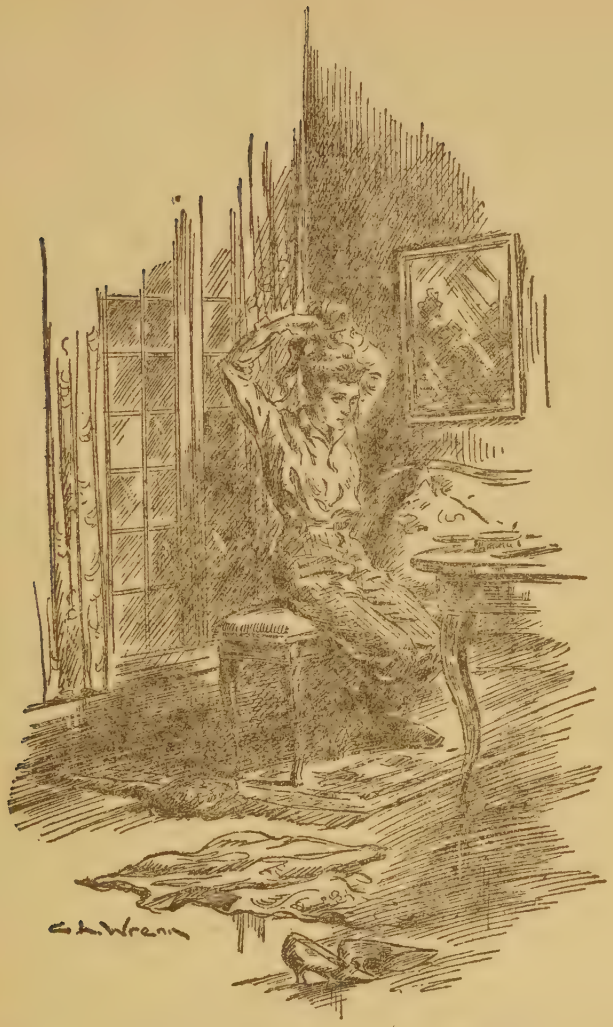
She looked excitedly into the glass and what she saw made her laugh. The result of her haircut was uneven and comical.

"As a barber I am not much of a success. But never mind, perhaps to-morrow I can find a real one. In the meantime I must keep my cap on all the while."

She picked up the corduroy cap and pulled it well down over her head.

"I am not exactly a dandy, but I do make a rather nice boy," she confessed to her laughing reflection.

Now that her hair was cut, the hardest part was over, and she could enter into the spirit of her adventure. She tied up the rest of her new belongings in a bandana handkerchief and smiled



"Without a tremor of hesitation she snatched up the scissors and began to cut hurriedly"

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as she did it. But the smile faded as she sat down before her writing-desk to write to her mother. She found her words with difficulty.

"*Dearest and best of Mothers:*

"I am going away from you to try serve my country. Tell Pierre that I have changed places with him, and not to be sad any more. Do not try to bring me back. When you get this I will be far away. I know the Bon Dieu will take care of me. Good-by, I love you all.

"VALERIE."

She slipped the sheet of paper into an envelope and kissed it tenderly. Then she waited until the faint click, click of Pierre's crutches sounded on the stairs, and tiptoed softly out of her room. She slipped her letter under her mother's door as she passed.

The house seemed unnaturally silent as she stole down the stairs. But when she pushed open the heavy front door, it groaned loudly on its hinges. She waited breathlessly, but no one stirred. She slipped out and closed it noiselessly behind her.

When she was half way down the garden path she stopped and looked at the house. There were no lights in the windows and not a sound broke the stillness.

"Good-by Mama, my poor Pierre, and grandpapa. You will be very, very sad to-morrow, I know, but you will understand," she whispered softly.

She turned and walked quickly down the path, and the gate clicked behind her as she disappeared into the darkness of the road beyond.

A Duval was going to answer the call of France at last.

CHAPTER V

AT RIVA

"NO, Monsieur le Capitaine, I will not tell you where I come from, because you will send me back."

Valerie, defiant in her boy's suit, stood before the French officer in the little town of Riva many miles from Vinon.

As might have been expected she had not traveled far before being found out, but the discovery took place on a train that was speeding towards the front with soldiers, and there had been no time to question her before she reached Riva.

The officer, an excitable little Frenchman before whom she stood, looked at her in dismay and held up his hands.

"How did you get on that train?" he demanded, "will you tell me that?"

Valerie laughed.

"Oh, yes, of course," she replied, "that was

easy. From my home I walked to—no, I will not tell you where, but anyway I finally reached Boré. There were naturally many boys on the street, and I listened to what they had to say to one another, and found out that most of them expected to leave for here that night. There was much grumbling among the younger ones because they were not to receive their uniforms for a few weeks.

"That, Monsieur, as you can imagine was good news. I was not so foolish as to think that I could walk up to the officer there and enlist. I thought that when I left home, but it was not long before I found out that I was wrong. Every time I spoke to any one they looked at me with suspicion. You see, I had forgotten about my silly girl voice, and when I tried to change it and speak gruff, like—like you, Monsieur, it was worse than ever.

"Well, of course, if I could not deceive the simple people on the road how could I hope to deceive a smart French officer—no, it was not to be thought of, and besides, if my voice did not give me away my hands would, so you see I gave up enlisting."

Valerie paused for breath, and the French officer waited dumbfounded for her to continue.

"I decided that I must get a uniform by chance, by a trick perhaps. Oh, I could have managed it, I know, if that sharp-eyed, wizened up old corporal had not been on the train."

"First, how did you get on the train?" the officer interrupted.

"Oh, yes, I am coming to that. It was oh, so easy, Monsieur, you have no idea. All the recruits went down to the station about noon. I followed. Each one had a little ticket. I had none, to be sure, but I went with them. At the gate there was such a crowd, such confusion, you can't picture it to yourself. I slipped in among the rest and through the gate. The guard was tired of looking at those tickets, I think, anyway he did not bother about me; I was safe inside in a jiffy. We were crowded in the train, of course, we sat in long cars on hard benches, it was a long dusty trip, and I was tired.

"You know the rest, Monsieur le Capitaine. I fell asleep and, of course, as bad luck would have

it, I selected the shoulder of that old Corporal. I don't know how long I slept, but when I woke up, oh, the very first thing I saw were his little black eyes behind his shaggy eyebrows, and I saw in them, Monsieur, as plain as though he spoke the words—'You are a girl dressed up in your brother's clothes.' I did not dare to move, but after awhile my neck was so stiff I had to. I expected him to speak, but not a word. I began to hope, but when we reached here he took me by the hand, —oh, he was so aggravatingly polite!—and he pulled me to one side of the station, and he said: 'I don't know, ma petite, what you are doing or how you got here, but I know you are not one of my boys, or any one else's for the matter of that, so I guess you had better come along with me.' "

Valerie stopped, her eyes were flashing angrily, and her cheeks were flaming.

"Monsieur le Capitaine, I ask you, do I look like a boy to you?" she demanded.

"You do, yes, that's the astonishing part of it," the officer replied.

"And don't I look strong too?"

A nod answered her.

"Then why can't I fight?"

"But you are a girl, and girls do not fight," the poor perplexed officer protested. "Won't you tell me, please, what ever put this foolish notion into your pretty head?"

"Oh, if you insist, yes, but isn't it a natural thing for a strong French girl to want to fight?"

"No, a thousand times no, my child," the officer denied. "A girl's place is behind the lines to nurse, to cook perhaps, but to fight—no, it is a ridiculous idea. Now tell me why you thought of it?"

Valerie sighed resignedly.

"I came, Monsieur, from a fighting family," she began, trying to quote old Monsieur Duval. "In every war we have done our share, except in this."

"Oh, I see, there are no men left now," the officer's voice was very gentle.

"No, that is not the reason exactly," Valerie went on. "There are two men, one is over eighty, and the other, my brother, is a hopeless cripple. Oh, Monsieur, don't you understand—for three

long years I have watched those two grieve over their worthlessness, as they called it, and I could stand it no longer! I was strong—I am strong, very strong, Monsieur, and I am afraid of nothing."

"I believe you," the officer smiled faintly.

"So I came to take my brother's place, and now you won't let me."

The officer did not reply at once. Perhaps for half a minute he was almost tempted to give in to her as a proof of his admiration for her bravery. At last he said gravely:

"You are a true and loyal daughter of France. I tell you, she is proud of you. I wish that what you ask was not so hard to grant, but, my dear, you do not understand all that war means."

"But, Monsieur, you will let me serve some way; you will not send me home." Valerie's eyes were alight with hope. The officer looked into them for a brief second. "No, my dear, that would be indeed ungrateful. I will find something for you to do. Now will you tell me your name?"

"Do you *promise* not to send me back?" Valerie inquired doubtingly.

"On my honor as a Frenchman," the officer replied.

"Then, my name is Valerie Duval."

"Duval! I know that name well," the officer exclaimed. "I have often heard of your father from my father. Your mother was half American, wasn't she?"

"Yes, Monsieur, on her mother's side," Valerie replied.

"I thought so. French and American, the combination accounts for everything," he smiled and then continued hurriedly. "Now, Mademoiselle Duval, we must decide what to do with you. Would you help in our estaminet?" (An inn.)

"Gladly, Monsieur le Capitaine," Valerie replied politely, but the tone of her voice showed disappointment.

"Good. Madame Lefevre has opened hers as a sort of canteen for the men. She is very busy and I know will be glad of your help. I will send

you to her at once, she will give you some suitable clothes."

The officer could not repress a smile as he regarded the ill-fitting, dusty suit before him. In answer to his order a corporal entered. He was the same one who earlier in the day had discovered Valerie. He was an old man, and an old soldier, but his piercing eyes were not without a gleam of kindness. Valerie looked at him angrily as he saluted the officer.

"Take this young lady to Madame Lefevre's, and tell her I will come myself and explain to her later on. Miss Duval is going to help Madame in the canteen."

The corporal saluted and stood aside at the door waiting for Valerie to pass. She was reluctant to go. It is hard to give up the dream of a soldier for the realities of an estaminet.

The officer noticed her hesitation. "This will be only temporary, Madame," he said courteously. "I promise you that if later I find anything that you can do for France, I will tell you. Your courage deserves that."

"Thank you," Valerie said earnestly, and passed the corporal with her head in the air.

The old man chuckled to himself and watched her, as she swung along, admiringly.

Madame Lefevre grudgingly accepted Valerie's offer to help, and after she had recovered from the surprise that the corduroy suit caused her, she promised to find some sort of dress for her.

The corporal delivered the Captain's message, and was ready to leave when he turned to Valerie. "Mademoiselle, I am sorry that I was forced to report you, but it was my duty," he said gruffly. "I admire courage whenever I find it—I ask your pardon."

"Certainly, Monsieur," Valerie replied, "but it was mean of you, duty or no duty, to tell on me, and you know it. I almost cry with rage when I think of it," she continued crossly, "to think that I cut off my beautiful hair, and only for five days —it is cruel," she ended lamely.

"Poor little one, now I regret my part more than ever," the gallant soldier smiled and put his hand over his heart. "In future I am at your

service always, Mademoiselle, remember that."

"Thank you," Valerie replied woefully, "that's something." Then the spirit of mischief getting the best of her, she brought her heels together smartly and saluted.

The corporal went off down the road chuckling. "She does it better than any of the new recruits," he said to himself, "I almost wish I had held my old tongue."

CHAPTER VI

RUMORS

THE small town of Riva was not many miles behind a part of the French front. It had in the first days of the war been under heavy bombardment, and when Valerie first saw it, it was a mass of ruined cottages.

It was used by the French for rest billets. New men came into it every few days from the front, and others left to take their places. The new recruits were sent there for their final training, so that the small uneven streets were crowded most of the time.

Few of the old inhabitants of Riva had returned. Madame Lefevre alone had stayed there during the bombardment. No threats could induce her to leave. She was a thin gaunt woman with skimpy gray hair and bony hands, but to the French soldiers that she served daily with cheese and

wine and bread she was a ministering angel.

Madame's husband had owned the inn, of which now only the first floor remained, and before the war he had done a thriving business, but he had been killed in the first month of the fighting, and Madame had taken over the establishment. With a grim determination to serve as best she could, she kept what was left of her home open day and night for the soldiers.

There had been no one to help her until Valerie came. At first she had resented the suggestion that she needed help, but as the days passed and Valerie proved her usefulness, she grew reconciled, and even grateful.

The soldiers back from the front were first astonished and then delighted, to have their wine served to them by a very handsome girl with short hair, and it was not long before they felt hurt if she was not there to wait on them. But they could hardly be blamed for their fickleness, for Valerie had a far more lavish hand in cutting the bread and apportioning the wine than the thrifty Madame.

It was not many days after Valerie's arrival, that the corporal came into the estaminet, and called for bread and cheese and a bottle of wine.

"A whole bottle, Monsieur," Valerie demanded, surprised, "what extravagance!"

The corporal laughed. "I always order a whole bottle, Mademoiselle," he said, "before I go into the trenches. It is a superstition with me. I know to be sure that in Heaven most things are of the best, but I doubt if the wine can rival the wine of France; so if I am to die I want to die with the pleasant memory of it, a large memory, Mademoiselle. And a glass—ah, well a glass is just a little glass."

"Such a way to talk," Valerie chided, "I'm ashamed of you, corporal! You should think of your sins when you die, not of food. But tell me, is it true that you are going back to the trenches?"

"Yes, back to the mud, and with a new lot of men—boys, I should say—your comrades, Mademoiselle."

"You mean the boys I came here with?" Valerie demanded.

"The same."

"Then if you had not found me out, I might have been going too, with them; think of it."

"I heartily wish you were," the corporal replied, "then I would be sure of one head in the crowd that had a few brains. Such a lot of imbeciles as these fellows are, and the worst of it is, there is work for us to do."

"An attack?" Valerie's eyes were wide with excitement.

The corporal winked knowingly.

"That I cannot say," he replied mysteriously, "maybe yes, maybe no, at any rate, I think there will be a little excitement. Listen to the guns. Now they rumble a little off and on, but in a few days perhaps they will begin to roar."

"Oh, please tell me some more," Valerie teased, "I am so excited."

The corporal laughed. "There is no more to tell just yet," he said. "Wait until we come back, then I will tell you everything."

More arrivals who called for bread and cheese

demanded Valerie's attention, and the conversation ended.

The next day the corporal, with some of the new recruits, left for the front, and the company they relieved returned to Riva. They were a very tired and very muddy lot of men.

"Is it very bad out there now, Monsieur?" Valerie asked one day as she served a big man from the south with wine.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, it is more than bad," he answered wearily, "there is no end to the fire. All day long the shells burst from a big gun."

"But why don't our guns stop it? Surely if we shelled it we could at least disable it."

"That is very good talk," the man answered with a show of contempt, "but before you can silence it, Mademoiselle, you must first find out where it is. That gun is hidden far back of the German lines. Our aeroplanes have tried to locate it, but they always fail; it must be in some clever spot."

"But can't you tell from the sound?" Valerie asked.

The man looked at her and shrugged his shoulders.

"How can you tell by the sound when there are half-a-dozen guns all barking at once? They are not so foolish as to try to fire it alone."

"Oh, I see," Valerie nodded her head understandingly.

"And now please bring me some more cheese, and don't ask any more questions. Girls are always asking questions, and for no purpose."

The man turned his attention to the plate before him and did not speak again.

Valerie was angry, but she did not say anything. She hurried through with her work, and telling Madame that she was going out for a little walk she strolled off in the direction of the Headquarters. She had not seen the Captain more than once or twice since her first interview with him. He was very busy and spent most of his time at his desk.

When Valerie had crossed the town and reached the building that served as Headquarters she did not attempt to go inside. She crossed to the other

side of the street and pretended to inspect the ruins of the old church. She knew that the Captain would have to come out sooner or later, and she was determined to wait for him.

After an hour her patience was rewarded. She saw the guard at the door stiffen up and salute, and the Captain came out and walked briskly down the two steps. He saw Valerie and stopped.

"Good afternoon, little Miss Soldier," he said, smiling. "How goes it?"

"Oh, there's plenty to do," Valerie replied gayly, "but it's not very exciting. Have you any news of my company?"

The Captain's face fell.

"Only bad news, Mademoiselle," he said gravely. "They lost a number of men just in taking over their position. There is a bit of road under German fire."

"Poor boys!" Valerie sighed, "killed before they even had a chance to fight. I suppose it was that hidden gun of the Germans that did it," she said.

"What do you know of the hidden gun?" the Captain demanded.

"Oh, not much, just what I've heard the soldiers say about it over their wine. It would make a lot of difference if it could be found, wouldn't it, Monsieur?" she asked idly.

"It would indeed. Our gunners have tried every way of locating it. It is well hidden, but we will find it in time, so don't worry over it. Have you written to Madame, your Mother?"

"Yes," Valerie replied, "I told her I was safe, and that there was no chance, unfortunately, of my being anything else."

The Captain laughed. When he had gone Valerie added to herself. "That was true yesterday, but not to-day. I will show that cross soldier why girls ask so many questions."

CHAPTER VII

THE GUNS

THAT night, true to the corporal's prophecy, the guns began to roar. Valerie and Madame Lefevre were washing dishes when the first boom shook the very foundations of the house.

"The attack," Madame said, hardly lifting her eyes from her work,—but Valerie stopped to listen. She had never heard the guns so plainly, and she felt a sudden thrill of terror at the ominous sound.

"This will go on for hours, I suppose," Madame spoke wearily; "then early to-morrow morning our soldiers will go over the top and capture the German's front trenches. By to-morrow night if we are lucky we may hear news. It is always the same, a long hard fight for a muddy ditch, death to many of our brave boys, and so much more of

our own country ours again. Always the same." Madame's voice trailed off in a low sigh.

Valerie looked at her and shivered, Madame spoke with too much assurance—the assurance gained from repeated experience—to leave room for a doubt. It was disheartening, and not at all as Valerie had believed it. She finished her work in silence and went down into the cellar, one corner of which served as her bedroom.

She could not sleep. The heavy fire of the guns kept her awake. They seemed to interfere with her ability to think. She tried to cover up her head, but could not shut out the sound.

Madame Lefevre came down a little later. She lost no time in getting to bed, and evidently the guns did not disturb her, for she fell asleep almost at once.

Valerie listened to her heavy breathing, and tried to force herself to think of something beside the guns, but she could not do it, they seemed to be pounding at her temples. She was so restless that just a little after midnight she got up and went to the room above. Anything was better

than the damp, cold smell of that dismal cellar. She opened the door and stepped outside. It was very dark and the air seemed heavy with fog. She sat down on the step and buried her head in her hands. In the open the guns did not terrify her as they had done, down in the cellar.

After a little a rumbling noise seemed to detach itself from the steady roar, and grow nearer.

Valerie sat up and listened. She looked intently down the road. Something big seemed to be lurching from side to side in the darkness ahead. She watched, and before long she could make out the shape of an ambulance. She waited until it was near enough to her, and then she called:

"What is it?"

The car came to an abrupt stop, and a man jumped from the driver's seat.

"Ambulance driver; lost my way," he said in very poor French.

"Are you an American?" Valerie asked in English.

The man gave a sharp exclamation of surprise.

"I am," he replied. "Thank goodness, I've struck somebody I can talk to. In the first place can you tell me where I am?"

"In Riva, back of the French lines. Army Headquarters are just across the town."

"Well, I guess I'd better report I'm lost," the man explained. "I must have taken the wrong turn, and I'm carrying six wounded."

"In there?" Valerie pointed to the ambulance, and the American nodded.

"Then there is no time to waste. Get back in your car and I will go with you to the Captain."

The man jumped back in his seat, and Valerie took her place beside him.

As the car hit the rough places in the road, she could hear the soldiers in their stretchers groan. A guard at Headquarters challenged them to stop, and when Valerie had explained he hurried to notify the Captain.

"You are twenty miles from your base," the Captain said, when Valerie had again explained. "You could not get there for the roads are all torn up. Are your wounded very serious cases?"

The American nodded.

"Isn't there a doctor around anywhere?" he demanded of Valerie.

"No, not here, but wait a minute," she turned excitedly to the Captain. "I served wine yesterday to three men who said they had been medical students before the war. If we could find them we could perhaps make those poor wounded soldiers a little more comfortable."

The Captain nodded agreement, and immediately sent off a guard to find the men. Then with Valerie and the American he rode back to the estaminet.

Valerie ran down to the cellar to call Madame Lefevre.

"Come quickly, we must get some beds ready, there are wounded."

Madame was awake and up in a minute, and with Valerie she lugged the mattresses from the cellar up to the dining-room, and put them on the top of the tables. The Captain and the American brought in the men. One of them was dead, and the others were suffering greatly. The Ameri-

can had his coat off and his sleeves rolled up, and was at work cutting off the muddy uniforms and trying to stop the flow of blood.

The medical students arrived breathless, and saluted the Captain. They were capable men and made the best of the little knowledge they had acquired. Valerie and Madame Lefevre seemed to be everywhere at once, fetching water and more candles, and doing whatever the men directed.

Before long two more ambulances arrived. Their drivers explained that there had been a surprise attack of the Germans, and that things were going badly at the front. The road to the hospital was wrecked so badly that traveling over it was impossible. There was little time to either ask or answer questions, for the new wounded had to be brought into the Inn and cared for also.

One man who had come in the last ambulance was a gunner. The stretcher-bearers had found him lying beside his gun. He was badly wounded and out of his mind. As Valerie brought him water he caught her hand and would not let her go. He seemed to confuse her in some way with

his own sister, and he tried to explain to her how everything had happened.

"It's that gun," he moaned. "It's doing all the damage. I've tried to find it, and I did, oh, I did! I had the range 8000–5–30 Right. Then they got Marsac, my friend Marsac. I was just going to fire, when—oh, what am I doing here, I must get back to my gun at once. Gunner number 42, attached to gun fire, sir," he tried to salute. "I tell you, the range is 8000–5–30 Right. Gun is hidden, but I know that will get it. I bet with Marsac,—oh, my little sister—I am going."

He rolled over suddenly on his side and seemed to crumple up. Valerie screamed, and the Captain came over to her.

"There, there, little one, it is much better so."

"He—he—said he had the range for the gun; the hidden gun," Valerie tried not to sob, "it was 8000–5–30 Right."

"Oh, he was out of his head, that means nothing," the Captain replied. "Go outside and breathe the fresh air for a minute," he suggested.

Valerie was only too glad to take his advice.

She shuddered as she walked past the rows of men, and tried to keep her eyes closed until she reached the door.

Once outside she took a long breath. It had begun to drizzle, and the feel of the rain in her face seemed to bring back her courage.

"8000–5–30 Right. 8000–5–30 Right," she repeated over and over to herself. "If he was right, and I could only get the news back to the lines!"

CHAPTER VIII

A STOLEN RIDE

"OH, here you are!"

A voice at her side made her start. She looked up to find the American standing beside her.

"Do they want me in there?" she asked.

"No, there's not much anybody can do. We've nothing to work with," he replied. "I'm going back to try and get to the front dressing station. It's in a cellar, and I may be able to bring back some supplies. The men who drove those cars in," he pointed to the two ambulances drawn up beside his on the road, "say that a Boche shell smashed the roof in, that's why they cleared out with as many men as they could find that were still alive."

"Well, I'm off, tell the Captain why I've gone,

will you? My French won't work under excitement."

"8000–5–30 Right," Valerie said aloud, then she turned to the man beside her. "Wait here, Monsieur, the Captain may have some other orders. I will be right back."

The American nodded and walked over to his car. Valerie hurried inside and found the Captain. She explained briefly.

"Have you any order for him?" she asked impatiently.

"No, tell him to find a doctor if he can," the Captain replied, "and wish him Godspeed. There is little chance of his coming back."

Valerie did not wait to hear more, but went out to the American.

"You are to find a doctor if you can," she told him, "and the Captain wishes you Godspeed."

"Oh, I'm not dead yet," the American laughed, "and I'm not going to be. I was born lucky." He started the car. "So long, see you later," he called.

Valerie waited until he backed around, and then

when he stopped to shift his gears, she jumped on to the step and crawled quickly in under one of the stretchers. The car darted ahead into the darkness at a terrific speed. The American did not seem to care about the bumps and he did not know he was carrying a passenger.

Valerie tried to find something to hold on to, for she was bumping around like a rubber ball. Finally she managed to climb into one of the stretchers and lay there trying to decide on some plan. She knew the number of the gun, where the dead man had been stationed, and she kept repeating the numbers of the range as he had repeated them.

"8000-5-30 Right. 8000-5-30 Right."

They meant nothing to her, but in a vague way she knew that if she could only say them to a gunner he would be able to understand.

The car lurched along, and the American started to sing. Valerie listened, and a sharp pang of homesickness brought sudden tears to her eyes. He was singing the same tune that the Americans had sung for Pierre their first eve-

ning at the Duval farm. She wondered what they were all doing now,—sleeping, she supposed.

"If I can deliver my message to some one, and they get that German gun, perhaps Pierre will not feel so bad. It will be a little something anyway," she said to herself. Then she fell to thinking of the big American Lieutenant Fielding, and wondering if some day he might not tell an American girl that the French girls "do things," too.

The inside of the ambulance was very dark, and she had no idea of where she was going. The noise of the guns grew louder, and every now and then one would seem to rip up the very earth beneath them. Her ears hurt her, and the top of her head felt as if it were coming off, but her mind was clear, and she remembered the important numbers.

As they came nearer to the Front, the American stopped singing and the speed of the car slackened. The road was not a road at all, but a great torn-up field full of deep shell holes, and he had to pick his way with care. The shells were bursting

all around them, and the noise and the din grew worse every minute.

Valerie wanted to scream, but by summoning all of her will power she kept from it. She bit her lip until it bled, and dug her finger nails into the palm of her hand. She wanted to tell the American that she was there, but she knew that he would feel he must try to take care of her, and she did not want that, for his task was hard enough without her adding to it, so like the brave soldier that she wanted to be, she kept quiet and waited.

At last the car stopped and she heard the American say to himself, "Pretty lively, but I guess this is about the spot."

He got down from his seat and Valerie watched him stumble off into the din ahead.

She was alone, alone with only some meaningless numbers running through her head, and without the slightest idea of what to do. She was terribly frightened, but she climbed out of the ambulance and started to walk towards the burst-

ing shells. Little snatches of things she had heard the Corporal say came back to her:

"If you see a shell lie down flat. Noise never hurt anybody." And most important, "Always know what you are going to do and go ahead and do it."

That was the hardest of all, for Valerie had no idea of what she was going to do, or how she was going to do it.

The ground was slippery and slimy with mud. She had hard work keeping on her feet, but she plunged ahead. Before she had gone very far all the Corporal's advice was forgotten, and her only thought was to meet some one, to hear a human voice in the midst of that hideous noise.

She ran when she could, but there were so many shell holes that she stumbled constantly. Her clothes, an old black dress of Madame Lefevre's, were covered with mud, and she kept putting her foot through the long skirt.

"Oh, why didn't I put on my suit," she said aloud, and then stopped suddenly for a voice answered her.

"Stretcher-bearer, help me, I am wounded," it called.

"I am not a stretcher-bearer, but where are you?"

At the first words Valerie's courage had come back to her.

"Here in this mud-hole." A hand caught her skirt, and she knelt down beside a soldier.

"Are you wounded, Monsieur?" she asked gently.

"A girl! By all the saints, what are you doing here?" The voice was weak, but Valerie knew from the tone that the speaker was disappointed.

"Yes, a girl, but I am here to find gun number five. Do you know where it is?"

"No, it should be over to the right, but wait for the next star shell. If you will prop me up I may be able to tell you."

"But I must get you back to the ambulance," Valerie protested, "there is one not far from here."

"No, no, Mademoiselle, please do not trouble

yourself," the soldier replied, "I am done for, so why waste precious time. I did not call you for help. I am a dispatch bearer, and I have important messages to get to Riva, the wires are down, and we are badly in need of support."

"Ah, there!" he exclaimed as a star shell illuminated the country for a moment, "over in that wood there is gun five, I think, but why do you want to go there?"

"I have the range for the big German gun," Valerie replied.

"The range?—then go at once—why do you wait? It will soon be dawn, and we are expecting the Germans to attack. Hurry, don't stand there gaping, if we can silence that gun we may yet save our line."

"Give me your dispatches then," Valerie said. "Perhaps I can get them back."

The soldier tried to move his arm, but failed. Not a groan escaped him as he said, "Pardon, Mademoiselle, but they are there in my case. You will have to get them."

Valerie's hands trembled as she felt for the papers.

"And now you?" she asked, when she had them safely.

"I, Mademoiselle, do not matter, I die for France, and I die gladly. Go, please—there is so little time."

Valerie's eyes were blinded by hot stinging tears, and a sob rose to her throat. She did not dare trust herself to speak. Instead, she leaned over and very tenderly kissed the wounded man on the forehead, then without giving her courage time to desert her, she ran as fast as she could towards the woods.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST SHELL

IN the sudden light of the star shell the wood had looked to be very near, but as Valerie stumbled along, it seemed to grow farther and farther away. The eerie light caused by the bursting shells did not help her, and only added to the terrible confusion.

Just as she had almost given up she ran into something. It was the charred stump of a tree, and at the touch of it she knew she was nearing her goal. She stood still and shouted, but in the deafening roar she could not even hear her own voice. She forged on again, still calling aloud; she did not hope to be heard, but it was a relief to scream.

She might have wandered about for hours searching in vain, for it is impossible to locate

even a big gun in such a tumult, and darkness, but fortunately there was a lull between shells. It was hardly perceptible, but it was long enough for her to hear voices. She ran frantically in the direction from which they came and found two men beside a big gun. One of them was lying on the ground, and the other was kneeling beside him.

They looked up at Valerie's approach. In the darkness they were no more than shadowy forms to one another, but the soldiers saw the skirt of Madame Lefevre's old dress flap, and when Valerie spoke they exclaimed, "A girl!" just as the dispatch bearer had exclaimed, but there was no hint of disappointment in their voices, only an incredulous wonder.

"Is this gun number five?" Valerie demanded.

On hearing such a practical question, the soldier who was not wounded recovered from his bewilderment sufficiently to reply, "Yes, gun number five."

"And are you a gunner?"

Another "yes."

"Then fire a shell 8000-5-30—Right,—it is the

range of the big German gun!" Valerie commanded excitedly.

"How do you know?"

"One of the gunners who was here before you, told me he found the range, but he was wounded before he could fire."

The man jumped to his feet.

"We are out of ammunition, Mademoiselle, but there is just one shell left. I did not send it because it was useless. At our last fire one of their accursed guns came so near getting our range, that a piece of the bursting shell wounded my comrade. I let them think they had silenced us, it seemed best until we got more ammunition, then I hoped to surprise them."

"But there is one shell!" Valerie demanded.

"Yes, just one."

"Then send it. Be careful to get the range just as I give it, the gunner who died was sure it was right."

"Tell it to me again," the soldier was preparing to load the gun.

Valerie repeated the numbers clearly.

The gunner set to work.

"Range 8000–5 degrees, 30 minutes, Right." He adjusted the gun methodically.

"All is ready, Mademoiselle," he said at last, "I hope it is right."

"Fire for France!"

Valerie gave the order in a low voice, and the man obeyed. The big gun shot forward, there was a deafening report, and then it fell back to its place.

They waited breathless.

To Valerie it seemed impossible to believe that anything could travel so far as that shell had to travel before it reached the big German gun, for the heavy artillery is always well away from the trenches on both sides, and the distance between is great. The gunner understood his gun, but he waited even more eagerly than Valerie. At last he exclaimed, "Silenced!"

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"Listen," he lifted a warning finger, "it is not working, can't you hear?"

Valerie shook her head. "No, it is just the

same to me," she said wonderingly. "Are you sure?"

"Beyond a doubt," the gunner laughed, a hearty laugh of relief, and the man on the ground raised himself on his elbow.

"It has stopped comrade, eh?" he asked weakly, "the big one?"

Valerie listened again intently, and tried to imagine that the noise did seem a little less, but if she succeeded, it was only through her imagination, for it takes trained ears to detect the different guns in a bombardment and to know when one is "tapped."

"I hope you are right," she said doubtfully.

"But, Mademoiselle, it has ceased firing. Listen, the great boom that should sound over there does not come. Perhaps we have only killed the gun crew, that I cannot tell. It will be well for me to go to another of our guns, but you must be taken back in safety."

"Oh, don't worry about me," Valerie replied, "I can get back all right; I must, for I have something else to do."

The gunner did not contradict; he went over to his comrade and lifted him gently.

"Come, I will get you on my back and we will find the dressing station," he said cheerfully.

"But that is destroyed," Valerie explained, "a shell hit it. The nearest place to take him is Riva. There is an ambulance waiting off there somewhere. Quick, we must hurry or it may be too late. Let me help you carry him."

"No, no, he is no weight," the gunner refused. "There, he is on my back, so."

They started off slowly, Valerie going ahead and pointing out the shell holes. Now that the big gun was silenced she had time to think of the dispatches, and the memory of the plucky fellow whom she had left to die alone urged her to hurry on. There were the streaks of dawn in the sky, and to her eyes accustomed to the dark by now it lighted up the whole country and made progress very much easier.

They reached the ambulance in a short time, but there was no driver. They lifted the wounded man into one of the stretchers, and Valerie ex-

plained to the gunner why the American had come.

"There is little chance of his returning," the man said with a shrug, "the road to the dressing station was under the heaviest fire. He is probably dead."

Valerie shuddered.

"Can you drive a car?" she asked.

The man nodded.

"Then take these dispatches and start. I will try to find the other gun and get some news of the driver. You can return at once."

The man considered for a moment.

"No, I cannot let you do that. You would be killed. Soon our men, if there are enough left, will go over the top and you could do nothing. The dispatches must be delivered, though now it may be too late. I will drive the ambulance, but you must come with me."

Valerie looked at the man and saw that it would be useless to protest, she would only delay the return if she argued.

"Very well, Monsieur, I will go," she said. "I have the dispatches here. Will you carry them?"

They started off slowly, Valerie going ahead and pointing out the shell holes

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"No, you keep them. Come, we must be off at once."

He turned to the car for a minute. Valerie did not know what to do, then an idea came to her.

"Start," she said. "I will stay beside your friend and do what I can for him, he is very weak." She climbed into the back of the ambulance.

The gunner took his place at the wheel and they were off.

Valerie waited until they had gone a little way, and then very gently she slipped the dispatches under the wounded man's head. He was unconscious and did not appear to notice. Then she crawled to the back of the car and waited. As she expected the gunner had to slacken his speed on account of the road. She waited until they came to a very bad place and as the car slowed down she jumped warily to the ground.

The car quickened its speed and lumbered on. She watched it until it was out of sight, then she jumped up and ran back towards the bursting shells for the second time, only this time she had a very definite plan in her mind.

CHAPTER X

THE RAT POINTS THE WAY

SHE followed the road ahead of her; it was very easy to distinguish in the coming light. The shells seemed to lose some of their power to frighten her, for their fire paled against the gray of the sky, but the noise was as deafening as ever, and the mud and slime grew worse at every step. She knew that the dressing station must be at the end of the road somewhere, for she had watched the American hurry off in that direction,—but how far, she had no idea.

When she had walked for about a quarter of a mile she reached what might have been at one time a tiny village, but now it was a desolate heap of ruins, with hardly one stone left above another. To Valerie it was more terrible than the open country, to have to walk through what remained of the little street. She thought of Vinon, and

tried to picture it in such a state. The picture made her angry, and she hastened her steps.

The guns had almost stopped firing and a silence, almost as terrifying as the noise had been, shrouded the little village. At the end of the street a pile of stones was smoldering. The smoke curled up and floated peacefully away.

Valerie stopped and looked about her. A pair of stone steps at a little distance seemed to lead into a hole in the ground, just a little to one side of the fire. As she looked at them, trying to make up her mind what to do, a big rat ran up them and scuttled across the road. Valerie started to scream. She was afraid, deathly afraid, of rats, and this one seemed a monster in the pale light, but the scream never passed her lips, for as she looked she saw that the rat was trailing a long stream of white behind him. She waited until he disappeared into another hole and then ran over to look. The white was a strip of bandage. Valerie watched it fascinated as it jerked along after the rat. She was too startled to act at once, her mind was befuddled. She stood swaying un-

certainly when suddenly the whole earth seemed to open before her very eyes and let free all the furies of fire and noise. A great curtain of flame shut out her view directly ahead at no very great distance, and the heavy roar of the guns was punctuated by sharp clicking sounds that came in rapid succession.

Terrified, Valerie dashed down the steps and through a short tunnel. It was narrow and very dark and ended abruptly. A heavy beam had fallen across the entrance to the cellar beyond. Valerie felt about her, and crawled under the beam. She felt, rather than saw, that she was in a big room. It was dark, and at first she could distinguish nothing, then from the very farthest corner she saw a steady red glow, no bigger than a pin point. A sudden hope flashed through her mind.

"Is there any one here?" she asked excitedly.

"Cæsar's ghost! Am I dreaming, or is that you again?" a voice answered that Valerie recognized with a thrill of joy to be the American's.

"Yes, it is I," she replied in English, "Can I get over to you?"

"Well, better be careful, there's a lot of things lying around, but you might try. I'd help you, only you see I'm pinned down under the roof and I can't move," the American replied.

Valerie started groping her way toward him.

"Keep your cigarette burning," she said, "I can find you by that."

She stumbled into things that felt like barrels, and once she struck her elbow against the sharp corner of a table, but at last she touched the American's outstretched hand.

"There now, what can I do to get you out?" she asked. "Why, you are all covered up with—"

"With roof," the American laughed, "Yes, I'm pretty well buried, but I guess it won't be all together this time, now that you've suddenly dropped from the sky. I've one free arm, and I can help you if you can find out just how deep in I am."

Valerie felt the heavy pieces of wood that seemed to be resting on the man's chest, and then her hand came into contact with something cold and damp. It was a sandbag.

"I am afraid to pull for fear everything will come down," she said, "and it is so dark I can't see. But look, I can see a patch of gray sky up through here and it won't be long now before we shall have light. Are you suffering very much?"

"No, not a bit, never felt better in my life, or more comfortable," the American replied cheerfully in spite of the terrible pain in his right shoulder. "We'll wait for the sun, and while we wait you can please explain just how you managed to arrive at this particular spot. Have you by any chance a wishing carpet?"

"Oh, Monsieur, it is no time to joke," Valerie chided, something terrible is going on up there. Just before I stumbled down these steps there was a whole cloud of fire and the guns began again. What does it mean, do you know?"

"The attack. That fire you saw was barrage fire; was it a long way off?" The American tried to shift his position, and one of the bags slipped a little.

"No, it was quite near," Valerie replied.

"H'm, sounds as if the Germans were putting

it over; there's a fight going on now but there's no telling much about it."

"How far away are we from the front trench, Monsieur?"

"Not a very healthy distance. We're just behind the last communication trench. There was an entrance into it before I left yesterday, but it seems closed up now."

"The noise is not so loud, I can hardly hear it."

Valerie stood up and looked through the jagged hole in the roof at the sky. "The daylight is coming fast," she said, "soon I will be able to move all that off of you."

"Oh, there goes that awful click, click noise again. What is it?"

"Machine guns," the American replied. "Come sit down and don't go poking your head out of that hole. You might get in the way of something and then how'd I get out?" he laughed. "I declare, I can't believe I'm not dreaming. Just a little while ago here I was smoking my last fag and making up my mind to die, and then you showed up."

"That is easy to explain," Valerie replied, and she told him about the events that had led up to her return.

"And you mean to say you just jumped off that ambulance and walked back here just to save me?—Well, I'll be darned! Why did you do it?"

"I hardly know, I think it was to help you with the hospital supplies," Valerie shrugged her shoulder. "Anyway here I am, and it is getting light. I think I can fix these logs now."

The American looked at her squarely, then he said, "You're a wonder, whoever you are. I'm inclined to think you're a sort of short-haired fairy, and if we are both killed before we get out of here I'll be proud to die with such a plucky mate."

"But, Monsieur, what is your name, anyway?"

"Billy Lathrop."

"Then, Monsieur Lathrop, we are not going to die," Valerie laughed. It was not a nervous laugh, it was clear and fearless.

"I think it is much too exciting to die just

now," she added as she stood up and began examining the heavy logs.

"Bully for you, you just bet we won't die!" Lathrop exclaimed. "We'll get those bandages back to Riva if we have to foot it all the way."

Valerie did not understand the slang he used, but she caught the spirit of the words.

"Good, Monsieur; now how about this log? It is leaning up against the wall at this end, and—"

"And, on my chest at the other," Lathrop finished, "do you think you can move it?"

"Yes, why not? Look, I will push it so." She pushed the log a little, but the roof threatened to cave in as she did it, and she stopped, frightened.

"It is easy to move, but see what will happen," she said.

"Well, we'll have to take a chance," Lathrop replied with determination, "clear off the sand bags that are on my legs first."

Valerie obeyed. There were a collection of boards and a few stones as well, but she soon had them pushed to one side and the lower part of

Lathrop's body was free. He moved his legs and stretched them. They were numb.

"Gee! That's a whole lot better," he said gratefully, "now let's see about this."

"If I move it quickly do you think you could slip out?" Valerie suggested.

Lathrop nodded. "Try it anyway," he said, "it seems to be my lucky day."

Valerie lifted the end of the log as best she could.

"Now quick," she exclaimed as she pushed.

There was a ripping sound, and then a dull thud as the end of the roof sagged and fell, but Lathrop threw himself clear.

"That's the ticket," he announced cheerfully as he rubbed his arm and shoulder, "it's something of a relief to have that load off a fellow's chest."

Valerie nodded sympathetically. "It must have hurt, oh, very bad," she said. "You were brave not to complain."

"Not a bit of it; look, there's a lot more of the sky in view now, and there's the sun behind the clouds, of course, as usual," Lathrop pointed.

Valerie looked. The hole in the roof was much larger, and through it a pale yellow sun was trying to shine through a bank of gray rain clouds.

As they stood looking, glad to feel even so slight a ray in the dark cellar, they heard a noise of running and shouting.

"What is it?" Valerie demanded.

For answer Lathrop pulled her away from the hole and over towards the stairs. "Wait here," he said, pushing her flat against the wall, "while I look."

He crept towards the steps to jump back suddenly as two big men wearing the German trench helmets appeared in the doorway.

CHAPTER XI

THE BOOMERANG

THERE was a breathless silence as Lathrop and Valerie waited against the wall. They could hear the men outside talking excitedly in German. At last one of them laughed and then came the welcome sound of their retreating footsteps. Lathrop went again to the door and looked out.

"Come over here, quick," he said, as he returned to Valerie, "they think they've got a fine little idea in their heads, but we're going to balk it."

"Can you understand what they say?" Valerie demanded.

"Well enough to get the hang of their plan," Lathrop replied. "I know about as much German as I do French. Here, quick, under here," he whispered as two shadows fell across the stone steps.

He pulled Valerie down under the table that was

turned over beside the wall. They huddled behind it and waited.

The Germans entered. Apparently they thought they were quite alone, for they did not even bother to lower their voices. They spoke excitedly, and brushed right by the table without noticing, or bothering to look behind it.

Lathrop had Valerie's hand, and at each new exclamation from the Germans he would squeeze it excitedly, so that she knew that he understood something of what was going on. Through the cracks in the table they could see the two men plainly, as they walked over and investigated the hole in the roof. Their interest seemed to be more than just curiosity, for they began piling up the sandbags and supporting them with the heavy logs and the broken boards and boxes. When they had arranged a sort of platform that suited them they left the cellar.

Valerie started to speak, but Lathrop put his hand over her mouth and whispered so low in her ear that she could hardly hear him, "Don't move, they're coming back."

They waited for what seemed an age, and then the men returned with a third. They were carrying something. It proved to be a machine gun. Lathrop caught Valerie's hand as he watched them lift it carefully on to the platform. They jostled each other and kept up an excited controversy all the time, and each one of them ran up the stairs and from his footsteps overhead Valerie knew that they were, in turn, inspecting the gun from the outside. When it was finally fixed to suit their ideas one of the men left. Then Lathrop leaned over and whispered: "We're even."

Valerie nodded, although at the time she did not exactly understand what he meant.

The men by the gun settled down comfortably on some of the sandbags and began to talk. Every now and then one of them would laugh. Valerie tried to make something out of their words, but she could not. She wished heartily that old Monsieur Duval had not been so strict in forbidding the lessons in German that Pierre's tutor had suggested. She had to trust that her

companion was making part of it out. At one time, just as one of the men laughed, he gave her hand such an angry squeeze that she felt he was understanding better than she had hoped.

At last a sound, other than the voices of the Germans and the scuttling of rats over the floor, came to them. It was the quick thud, thud of men marching at double time.

The Germans pushed their heads out of the hole, and under cover of the noise Lathrop whispered: "The French are retreating to meet their reinforcements from Riva, then they will rally and advance. The gun is pointed towards them; do you see? When they come forward to attack, it will mow them down."

"Can we warn them?" Valerie demanded, "Oh, we must!"

"Not a chance," Lathrop replied, "but keep quiet, we'll do something, that you can bet."

The running above them continued, and the Germans settled back on their sandbags to wait.

Try as she could Valerie could not think of a way to interfere, and she was dreading the

thought of hiding there helpless while the gun did its terrible work, when Lathrop spoke to her again. There was so much noise going on overhead that they could speak with safety.

"Don't follow me when I move," he warned. "Stay where you are and don't watch if you can help it. I'm going to try a little trick on Fritz over there, but I'd rather know you weren't looking."

Valerie nodded. She had no intention of staying where she was, but she did not bother to say so, and Lathrop took the nod as a promise.

The tramping above them grew suddenly louder as the French marched directly over them; then fainter. They waited and listened. Before long a great cheer sounded.

"They've met the reënforcements," Lathrop whispered. "Now's our chance, keep steady and if I need you, I will call."

As he finished speaking a shadow blotted out the light in the doorway. A German shouted an order down the steps, and disappeared. The men by

Without thinking what she did she picked up Lathrop's revolver and fired at once

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the gun began to work hurriedly. Lathrop watched them intently. He was resting on one knee, his revolver held tight in one hand, and Valerie's arm in the other.

"Keep cool for Pete's sake," he said aloud. "Here's where I interfere."

He jumped lightly over the table and fired twice. Valerie was close behind him. The two Germans fell forward over the gun. Lathrop pulled their limp bodies to the floor, threw his revolver down, and climbed up beside the gun. He swung it around until it pointed in the opposite direction. He was just going to fire it when once again the light from the door was blotted out.

A bullet sang through the cellar and grazed Lathrop's cheek. Valerie was stung into sudden fury. Without thinking of what she did, she picked up Lathrop's revolver and fired it once. Another bullet came from the doorway, but it struck the wall away to the side. Valerie fired again.

The form in the doorway swayed, and a big

German officer fell headlong down the stairs. In her excitement Valerie did not even look at him. She went to Lathrop.

"He is quite dead," she announced triumphantly, then as she saw the blood coming from Lathrop's cheek, she said.

"Here, quick, sit down."

Lathrop pulled out his handkerchief and dabbed his face with it.

"Oh, it's nothing much," he said. "I'm all right now. Here, tie this around my head for me, will you?"

Valerie carefully tied the handkerchief, and Lathrop went back to the gun. "See them?" he pointed as Valerie climbed up beside him.

She looked out of the opening. A solid line of Germans were rushing towards them, bayonets fixed, and from a little behind them she could hear the French advancing.

Lathrop gritted his teeth, for the wound in his cheek made him dizzy, and began firing.

The front rank of the Germans wavered and fell, but their places were soon taken by others,

but again Lathrop mowed them down with the gun, only pausing to reload it when the round of ammunition gave out.

Valerie watched him and helped when she could, but most of the time she kept her eyes fastened on the oncoming Germans. They had just finished reloading for the third time, when suddenly everything went black in the cellar. One of the German bombers had located the gun.

When Valerie opened her eyes she was dazed and frightened, but not hurt. She called to Lathrop, but he did not answer. He was lying on his face at her feet. Outside the Germans seemed to be coming on faster than ever.

At sight of them Valerie's brain seemed to clear. She went to the gun and did exactly what she had seen Lathrop do. To her joy the gun responded to her touch, and she swept the Huns before her. Men fell one above the other, the lines wavered, then broke, and the Germans turned their backs and ran. Valerie kept on firing the gun until the ammunition gave out, then with a feeling almost akin to ecstasy she saw the blue coats of

the French soldiers surge past her in pursuit.

There seemed nothing more for her to do, so she turned to Lathrop. He was lying very still. She was almost afraid to touch him for fear of what she would find, but a faint flicker of his eyebrow showed her that he was alive. She spoke to him, but he did not answer. There was an ugly wound in the back of his head.

For the first time Valerie noticed the three dead Germans. They looked very stiff and gruesome in the half light, and she was suddenly terrified. She lifted Lathrop up under his arms and dragged him to the door and up the steps. The clouds had vanished from the sky and the sun was shining. The last of the French were well off after the Germans.

Valerie sat down beside Lathrop and began to cry.

CHAPTER XII

THE RETURN TO RIVA

TWO stretcher-bearers found her a little later, sound asleep with her head buried in her arm. They were American boys, and the sight of her rendered them very nearly speechless.

"What under the sun—" one of them exclaimed.

"Why, it's a girl, and that's old Lathrop beside her, or I miss my guess," the other replied.

They hurried forward and one of them roused her gently. Valerie opened her eyes and stared at him, then as the memory of the last few hours returned to her she jumped up.

"I was asleep," she exclaimed in dismay, "when I should have been finding some one to help him." She pointed to Lathrop and knelt down quickly

beside him. "He is not dead," she added joyfully, "see I can feel his heart beat. Quick, take him to a doctor."

The stretcher-bearers nodded and lifted Lathrop onto a stretcher.

"Are you strong enough to walk?" one of them inquired of Valerie.

"Oh, but yes, there is nothing wrong with me. I was just dazed a little perhaps. I will never forgive myself for going to sleep," she said sadly as the men walked back with the stretcher.

An ambulance was waiting in the road beyond the village.

"Where are you going to take him?" Valerie demanded.

"Riva, that's the nearest dressing station," the men told her.

"Oh, good, that is where I come from," Valerie exclaimed, "did they get bandages and a doctor?"

"Yes, they sent out a hurry call to the base and a whole cart load arrived by noon."

Valerie looked up at the sky.

"Is it so late as that?" she said, "it seems

only a few minutes ago that I was waiting for dawn."

Lathrop stirred on his stretcher, and one of the men spoke to him.

"All right, old man, we've got you safe and sound. A short run and then you'll be between the sheets."

Lathrop paid no attention to his words. "Where is she?" he demanded, trying to sit up.

"Oh, I am here, Monsieur," Valerie hurried to him, "please do not fret."

"Are you safe? I've been seeing you dead for hours, and I couldn't seem to call."

"Yes, yes, I am perfectly safe. You were hurt, but I wasn't. After the cellar got all black, you remember, I came to, and at first I was a little dizzy, but it was nothing."

"Drat it!" Lathrop tossed feverishly. "To think it had to get me just at that moment, and all that beautiful ammunition wasted."

"No, never fear," Valerie put her hand on his shoulder and patted it. "It was not wasted. I fired it, every little speck, and the Germans ran

away, and our boys went after them. I think," she added with a little laugh, "they will chase them all the way to Berlin."

Lathrop dropped back on his stretcher and grinned contentedly. "You certainly are a wonder," he said feelingly. "Home, James!" he waved his arm to the driver of the ambulance.

The ride back to Riva was a very rough one. Valerie decided that there were twice as many holes as there had been when she had traveled it, so short a time ago as the night before. Lathrop lost consciousness on the way, and did not come to again until he was in bed in the dining-room of the estaminet.

The new doctor dressed his wounds and Valerie stood by to help. She flatly refused to go to bed herself. In a vague sort of way she was trying to punish herself for sleeping in the early part of the afternoon. As no one knew very much about what she had gone through they did not insist; there were too few hands as it was to refuse the help of an extra pair.

It was not until nearly noon the next day that

the doctor sent for her. Madame Lefevre found her in the shed that served as a kitchen, where she was busy boiling some water.

"Leave that," Madame ordered. "The doctor wants you in a great hurry. He's waiting in the ward."

Valerie dried her hands and went into the house.

The doctor was sitting beside Lathrop when she came in. Beside him was the French Captain—he had been wounded in one arm the day before, but was not ill enough to occupy one of the precious mattresses, so he said, and he insisted upon staying up and helping the doctor. Both of them looked up as Valerie entered, and waited respectfully at the foot of Lathrop's mattress.

"You are to go to bed at once," the doctor announced with decision, "and not a word out of you. This afternoon we will send you on to the base hospital."

"And from there home," the Captain added.

"But why, I should like to know?" Valerie protested indignantly. "I am not sick, I am not wounded even a little tiny scratch."

"I told you so," Lathrop grinned with the only corner of his mouth that was visible, and his eyes twinkled.

The Captain put his hand on Valerie's shoulder.

"Monsieur here has told us everything, ma petite," he said gently. "There are no words in which we can express our feelings, the doctor and I, that's why we are gruff. You have saved many lives by your bravery, and turned a loss into victory. No one will ever appreciate all you have done, and surely there is no thanks great enough."

"But then—then why must I go to bed?" Valerie's voice faltered, and she tried not to sob, but the Captain's words made a lump in her throat.

The doctor laughed and replied in English: "Because, you plucky little thing, you're dead tired and don't know it. You'd go on working, and then suddenly, some fine day, you'd go all to smithereens, and then it would be very hard to make you well again, and we don't want that."

"I should say not," Lathrop agreed. "Why, I might get into a tight hole again, and then where

would I be if you weren't around to haul me out? Go on now, be a good kid and do what the doctor tells you," he begged.

Valerie looked from one to the other of the three men.

"Then if I go to the hospital, they won't keep me there very long, will they, and when I get back you will let me go on working?" she asked.

"What is it?" the Captain inquired in French.

Valerie explained, and added, "Please, please, Captain, don't tell my mother. She will be so worried. I will write her a letter saying I am well and safe."

"No, that would not be quite fair, and besides I have already promised Madame, your mother, to take care of you. I have not kept my promise so far, but I will. She will not make you go home unless you wish. But come now, it would be nice to see her some day,—say, two days from now, beside your bed—wouldn't it?"

Valerie's eyes filled with tears. Just at that moment the sight of her mother was the one thing in the world she most wanted. She nodded to

the Captain and turned back to the doctor.

"I will go if you say I must," she said. "But please, please, don't make me lie down now. I am afraid to I am so very tired, I would hate to get up again."

"Thought as much," the doctor replied shortly, "well all right, the ambulance will be leaving soon, so sit here and talk to Lathrop."

Valerie thanked him and sat down on the edge of the table that supported Lathrop's mattress. The doctor and the Captain went outside to consult about something, and it was not until they were quite out of hearing that Valerie began to wonder how the Captain had found out where her mother lived. It was a mystery that was never explained.

Lathrop had to do most of the talking for Valerie was too tired.

"Say," he began, "I haven't really thanked you for saving my life, you know, but of course I am awfully obliged. I didn't think I'd mind losing it much when I first came over, but—well, you'll

never know just how glad I was to hear your voice when I was trying to hold up the roof."

Valerie laughed.

"I was as glad to see the tiny glow of your cigarette, I can promise you. I thought I was all alone with the rats," she said. "And what would have become of me without you when the Germans came?" she added with a shudder. Her eyes had a look of sudden terror. "Monsieur Lathrop," she said gravely, "I killed that big man with your gun—do you remember?—I, Valerie Duval, killed a man."

"You bet you did," Lathrop spoke lightly, "you're a good shot, too. If you hadn't been, well, neither of us would be sitting here quietly discussing the price of potatoes. You saved my life twice within a couple of hours—" he whistled. "I can't thank you for it; no use trying, but, well I can tell you who would."

He put his hand in the pocket of his coat that was hanging on a chair by the bed, and pulled out a leather picture frame. Valerie opened it. A

smiling face of an old lady looked up at her from one side, and a pair of serious, troubled eyes met her as she looked at the other.

"Your mother?" she asked.

Lathrop nodded. "Yes, and the best one in the whole world at that," he said proudly.

Valerie pointed to the other picture. "And is she your sister?" she asked.

"Well, not exactly," Lathrop flushed. "She's a little more than that. You see, she's going to be Mrs. Lathrop some day when this war's over."

Valerie clapped her hands delightedly.

"Oh, she is your fiancée, I understand. Oh, Monsieur! I am glad that I found you yesterday for both of them," she exclaimed. "Tell me about them please?"

Lathrop once started was hard to stop. He extolled the virtues of the two women dearest to him in the world until Valerie almost felt as if she knew them.

"And to think that you will see your mother soon," he added. "Lucky you."

"Yes, I am lucky," Valerie replied, "I did not know how homesick I was until just now when the Captain spoke."

There was a noise outside at this point. The ambulances were getting ready to start. Valerie watched the stretcher-bearers take out the wounded one by one until the room looked deserted. The Doctor and the Captain returned.

"Get ready, ma chère," the Captain said. "You are going with me. I have to go myself on account of my arm, so we will go together in an automobile. It will be more comfortable, and I want to see you safe in the hospital."

"I have nothing to get ready with, Captain," Valerie laughed. "Unless I change into my boy's suit."

"No, no, come as you are then," the Captain replied. "The car is ready."

"Good-by," Valerie took Lathrop's hand in hers. "We will see each other soon, I hope."

"Good-by," Lathrop replied gravely. "You're the best little sport that ever lived, and I won't

forget the debt I owe you in a hurry." He squeezed her hand.

"And I will not forget you ever, Monsieur," Valerie promised. "And now, good-by until we meet again."

The ride to the big, comfortable hospital far away from the front was a long trip, and when Valerie and the Captain arrived it was late at night.

A nurse met them at the door and embraced Valerie tenderly. News of her bravery had traveled before her, and every one in the hospital was eager to do everything in their power for her. She was put to bed in a little room at the top of the house where she would be quiet. It was one of the nurse's rooms, but Valerie never knew that. All she saw was a trim bed with clean white sheets that waited invitingly to receive her tired little body. She was soon bathed and in it. She was almost too tired to eat the tempting supper prepared for her.

The matron, a very erect, gray-haired French woman, came in the last thing and kissed her good-

night. When she turned out the light and closed the door behind her, Valerie snuggled down gratefully between the cool sheets.

"I am happy," she whispered to the four walls, "oh, so happy! I have served my France, and I have saved a man's life twice, just as Helen Carey saved the life of Lieutenant Fielding."

With a happy smile on her lips she dropped off into a sound refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CROIX DE GUERRE

"MAMA! Mama!"

Valerie opened her eyes and found herself looking straight into Madame Duval's.

It was the third day of her stay at the hospital and she was very much better. Some of the drawn lines about her mouth and eyes had disappeared, but she was still very pale and weak. The reaction of that long night and day had set in, as the doctor had said it would.

Madame Duval dropped to her knees beside the bed, and took her daughter in her arms.

"Valerie! Valerie!" was all she could find to say as she kissed her.

"When did you come?" Valerie demanded. "I was dreaming of you this very minute, and of Pierre. How is he?"

"He is very proud of his little sister," Madame Duval said, "and so is grandpapa. How you would laugh to see him strut about and talk of his granddaughter, a true Duval."

"I think I can," Valerie laughed. "I am so glad he is proud of me, though, of course, being a girl, I have done very little. But they wouldn't take me for a soldier, you know."

"Yes, I know," her mother replied gravely. "The Captain wrote me all about it. Oh, Valerie, if you knew how we worried, how terrified we were the morning after you left! If it had not been for Lieutenant Fielding, I think I would have gone mad."

Valerie sat up in bed. "What did Lieutenant Fielding do?" she demanded.

"He traced you to Riva, and found out you were safe," her mother replied.

"Do you mean to say he followed me?" Valerie insisted.

"No, no, of course not, he could not leave like that, though he did want to,—he had become very fond of you, dear child, in those few days,—I had

no idea,—and he was quite distracted. He went directly to his Colonel, and between them we found out where you were. Then came your letter and the Captain's."

"But why didn't you make me come home?" Valerie interrupted.

"Why, my dear, I could not do that. If you wanted to go so much I could not keep you. France comes first; and see now what a service you have rendered her."

Valerie nodded. "I have done a little, yes," she admitted.

"And will you come home now, back to Vinon?"

"For a little while, yes, I must see my Pierre," Valerie replied eagerly. "Oh, Mama, I have been so homesick and so frightened since I left, you will never know."

Madame Duval looked at her, and something in her eyes made Valerie doubt the truth of her own words.

A knock at the door interrupted them. The matron, Madame Condé, came in, smiling.

"How is the little heroine to-day?" she in-

quired, "well enough to go out into the garden for a little while?"

"Oh, yes, sister," Valerie exclaimed joyfully, "I would love to go out."

"I thought so. Well, rest until after luncheon, and then I will come back and take you down there. But—" she added mysteriously—"you must promise to keep very calm if there is any excitement," and she added, laughing, "I have an idea there will be."

"Oh, what?" Valerie begged, "please, please, tell me!"

"Not a word," Madame Condé shook her head. "There you go getting excited now, and it is barely noon." And without another word she left the room.

"Mama, do you know what is going to happen?" Valerie demanded.

But Madame would only shake her head and smile.

At two o'clock Valerie went down to the garden between her mother and one of the nurses. She was dressed in a simple white frock that Madame

Duval had brought to her, and with her short curly hair she looked far younger than her sixteen years.

The garden was at the back of the hospital, and many of the soldiers were sitting about among the flowers, in comfortable steamer chairs.

Almost the first person that Valerie saw was the corporal. His right foot was bandaged, and a pair of crutches stood beside his chair. At sight of Valerie he got up and hobbled to her.

"The little soldier!" he said excitedly. "Comrades, here she is!"

A cheer rose from the lawn, and Valerie was surrounded by a group of admiring men. They shook her hand eagerly and gazed at her with genuine devotion.

The Captain made his way through the group to her. His arm was in a black sling, and he wore a new and spotless uniform.

"You are better, so much better, I can see it," he said, bowing very respectfully, "but you are not quite well. Come and sit down over here."

He led her to the end of the garden where a

number of officers, all with either a leg or face bandaged, sat smoking.

"Sit here," he said, pushing a big chair into the warm sunshine.

Valerie was very much confused at so much attention.

"Oh, thank you, please don't bother," she said, and let her mother and the officers do the talking.

After a few minutes the Captain said.

"Here comes a friend of yours."

Valerie turned and looked. Lathrop in a wheel-chair was being pushed towards her by a smiling sister.

"Hello there!" he called to her. "I hoped you'd be here for the fireworks,—oh, that is, the tea party; he corrected as the Captain gave him a warning look.

Valerie did not notice anything strange in his words. She had long ago decided that the meeting of all of her friends was the explanation of Madame Condé's mystery. She lost all feeling of embarrassment at sight of Lathrop, and chattered to him eagerly. They were so busy going

over their adventure together, that Valerie did not notice the excitement that was going on behind her, and she was very much startled to hear a band playing the strains of the Marseillaise.

She jumped to her feet at once, and the officers about her saluted and stood at attention.

The sweeping driveway was in view of the garden, and as Valerie looked she saw a detachment of men preceded by a military band, marching towards her. The band stopped at the side of the hospital, and Valerie saw to her joy the staunch figure of the bravest and best loved General of France standing in the small group of officers. She was so surprised that she hardly noticed that the soldiers lined up five on a side making a pathway to him. But she came to her senses with a start when the Captain took her arm and led her gently forward.

"Where are you going?" she demanded, conscious that every eye was upon her.

"The General wishes to speak to you," the Captain told her quite calmly. He was responsible

for the surprise, and he was delighted at the way his silence had turned out.

Valerie walked as if she were in a dream. As she came to the double line of men she stopped, for the Captain had dropped her arm and was walking away from her.

At a command the men before her pulled out their swords and crossed them over the path. With her heart throbbing excitedly, Valerie walked beneath their glittering blades.

The general was waiting for her.

"Valerie Duval," he said. "I decorate you in the name of France for your splendid courage and bravery," he began, but something in Valerie's ridiculously youthful appearance made him stop. He took both her hands in his and shook them. "You look too small to be so brave," he laughed, then he added gravely, "but I think in your eyes I see the spirit that must have shone in the eyes of Jeanne d'Arc, the dauntless courage and love for France."

He stopped. Valerie was trembling like a leaf, and his words hummed in her ears.

The General motioned to one of his officers who handed him a small cross hung on a ribbon. The General pinned it reverently on the front of Valerie's dress. He drew his sword and touched her shoulder with the tip of it, then he kissed her on both cheeks.

The band started to play, and the soldiers cheered lustily.

Valerie never knew how she got back to her mother, she was so flustered. Her eyes were bright with tears as she watched some of the soldiers line up along the path and receive their decorations.

Lathrop was the first. The General had a special word for him, too. Then came the astonished Captain, and last of all the corporal, who had showed great bravery in the charge.

Valerie tried hard not to let the tears fall, for she felt that this was no time to be a cry baby, but it was difficult, and one stole gently down her cheek as she looked proudly at the medal, the coveted Croix de Guerre, as it lay on the folds of her white dress.

CHAPTER XIV

WITH PIERRE

"TELL me everything, every single thing," Pierre demanded. "I have heard nothing but a few skinny facts."

"Of course I will," Valerie laughed. "But do let us wait until we are home at least."

She was sitting in the little donkey cart opposite her brother, and they were climbing up the long hill to the farm. At sight of the familiar landmarks, she pressed her mother's hand excitedly.

"Oh, it is so good to be home!" she exclaimed. "I thought the train intended to poke on forever."

"You were not very eager to leave," her mother teased. "Only imagine Pierre, when your big sister, who has been a real heroine, left the hospital, she cried like a baby."

"I don't blame you a bit," Pierre replied, taking Valerie's hand. "I would have cried too. But tell me, did some high-up officers thank you

for what you did?" he inquired. "I have been thinking perhaps you will receive a decoration."

Valerie and her mother exchanged glances. "Oh, come now, Pierre, your imagination will run away with you," Valerie teased. "I will tell you everything when we get home."

"Then I must wait, I suppose," Pierre sighed.

During Valerie's absence, his eyes had lost their wistfulness, and in its place there was a look of pride and joy.

"What a shame it is that 'Shoulders' will not be here to listen, too," he said presently.

"Shoulders?" Valerie inquired, "who is he?"

"Why, Lieutenant Fielding, of course," Pierre laughed; "that is his nickname. You see, he is mostly all shoulders, and that is why he asked me to call him that. You know, he's my very good friend, and he's going to be always and always."

"Isn't Lieutenant Fielding still here?" Valerie asked slowly. Something had suddenly gone out of the golden October day.

"No. Didn't Mama tell you?" Pierre replied. "He was transferred to the Engineers, and is up

in the north now near the English lines. I call it plucky of him to do it."

"Why did he?" Valerie asked.

"Because he wanted to get near the front where there was something doing. He was tired of drill, drill, drill."

"Are Captain Webb and Lieutenant Carey still here?" Valerie inquired.

"Oh, yes, they are very envious of 'Shoulders,' but they had to stay at their posts. They are very anxious to see you. Lieutenant Carey has a brave sister, too."

"Yes, I know; Helen," Valerie said.

"Who told you?" Pierre demanded.

"Lieutenant Fielding. She saved his life twice."

"Oh, I know that, and she is going to marry Captain Webb some day. Did he tell you that too?"

Valerie nodded.

"Well, I think she's a great silly," Pierre continued. "Just imagine marrying Captain Webb and not 'Shoulders.'"

"Perhaps Lieutenant Fielding didn't want to marry her," Madame Duval suggested, laughing.

"Of course he did not," Pierre agreed, "or he would have. He gets what he wants most always, I shouldn't wonder," he added.

Valerie laughed.

"Oh, Pierre, you always do make out the people you love to be saints," she teased. "Do hurry that stupid beast along. See, we are almost home, and there is grandpapa."

Old Monsieur Duval was leaning on the gate watching the road eagerly. At first sight of the cart he waved his stick over his head. Valerie waved back. She was soon in his arms, and he was saying a great many things that might have turned a granddaughter's head, had it contained less wisdom and common-sense than Valerie's curly one.

"Come, come, no more now," Madame Duval protested, interrupting the flow of words. "The child is tired and must go inside."

They walked up the garden path and into the house, all talking excitedly.

Valerie was tired out from her trip, and was only too glad to sit down in the big comfortable chair that her mother fixed for her on the terrace. As soon as she was comfortably settled, Pierre sat down on a stool beside her.

"Now begin," he said.

Valerie looked at him for a minute in silence.

"Very well, dear," she said. "But before I say a word, you must promise to remember that everything I did, I did in your name. I was thinking of you; that gave me courage. I went to take your place, and if I did well it was because of you—will you promise to remember?"

"I promise, yes," Pierre replied gravely.

Valerie told him the story of her adventures, beginning with the night she cut off her hair, and ending with the day in the hospital garden.

"And here is my Croix de Guerre," she said. "I kept it hidden so that I would not have to tell my story backwards. Here, let me pin it on your coat, for it rightly belongs to you."

"No, no," Pierre protested, "it does not, it is

yours. I could never have been so brave. Pin it on your dress and never take it off."

"But I won it for you," Valerie insisted.

"Then wear it for me; do you think I could take it? No, never in a thousand years. I want to see it on you every time I look at you."

Pierre's eyes were shining with excitement. He took the medal from Valerie, and with clumsy, trembling fingers pinned it on her dress. Then he caught the sound of men marching.

"Here they come!" he exclaimed joyfully. "The boys—do you hear them? They are back from their hike. I must go to meet them."

Valerie nodded, and he hurried off, his crutches clicking faster than she had ever heard them before. She was looking down at her medal and thinking, when Captain Webb and Lieutenant Carey joined her.

"Well, here's the little heroine—welcome home!" the Captain exclaimed, shaking her hand. "My, but I'm proud to know you!"

"And look at her cross," Lieutenant Carey added. "I've only heard a few scraps, but

they're enough to make me tremble before such nerve. How did you do it? Tell us all about it."

"Oh, Lieutenant how can you talk so," Valerie protested, "when you have a sister braver than I am."

"Who, Missy? Shucks, she'd be the first to think you were the winner," Lieutenant Carey laughed. "You did far more than she ever did, but that doesn't mean I'm not proud of her too."

"And you, Captain?" Valerie teased. "Do you think I am braver, too?" she asked, laughing mischievously.

Captain Webb was saved the embarrassment of replying by a shout that came from the barn. Pierre returned, excited and out of breath.

"Valerie, I have told them," he exclaimed, "and they want to see you and your medal. Do you mind?"

Valerie jumped up. "Mind? Of course not. I am glad, silly. I will go to them."

The Americans received her a little shyly at first, but they looked at her medal with genuine interest and respect.

"We sure do congratulate you, ma'am," Goodwin said, speaking for them all. "And I guess the boys you saved do, too. That was some stunt swinging the gun around, if you don't mind me saying so," he added.

Valerie had not quite understood all the slang he used, but she smiled. "You would have liked to see the Germans run," she said. "I think they must be running yet."

"And you fired the gun yourself?" Lieutenant Carey asked. He and the Captain had followed her to the barn.

"Yes, the last time, after Monsieur Lathrop was wounded," she replied. "It was very easy, it was a little gun, you know."

The men regarded her in silent admiration, and then led by Goodwin they gave her three long cheers.

"Oh, dear!" Valerie said when they had stopped and she was back in the terrace; "I do wish they wouldn't do it. It makes me feel so silly."

Captain Webb laughed. "Now I should think it would make you proud. If you don't want to

be treated as the heroine you are, you mustn't wear your cross, and I'd advise you to keep indoors."

"Oh, it isn't that I don't like it," Valerie protested; "only, well, you can't understand—anyway it is good to be home again, and I am so glad you are here," she added graciously. "I miss Lieutenant Fielding though. Do you hear from him?"

"Not much. He's pretty busy, I guess," Lieutenant Carey replied. "You know he's with the Engineers now. Captain Webb is going over too, in a few days, and I will be all alone."

Valerie turned to the Captain. "Are you really? Oh, I am so sorry. We will miss you."

"Well, I am mighty sorry to leave," Captain Webb replied. "I've had a splendid time here."

"When do you leave?" Pierre asked.

"In a day or two. I have not had my orders yet, but I expect them any time."

Madame Duval interrupted them at this point, for it was growing chilly and she wanted Valerie to go upstairs.

"You will be so tired to-morrow if you don't rest, dear," she said. "And besides, grandpapa has been very busy in your room, and I am curious to find out what he has been doing."

"I wondered where he was all this time," Valerie said as she got up. "We will go this minute and see." She said good-night to the officers and kissed Pierre. "Play for me on your flute to-night," she whispered, "I will listen for it."

Her brother nodded happily, and she went up the stairs with her mother. At the door of her room she stopped.

"Mama, see what he has done!" she exclaimed, and pointed to the bed.

A sword, of an old fashioned design, but brightly polished, hung from the wall above the head board. It was the sword of the Duvals, and the old gentleman's silent tribute to his granddaughter's valor.

CHAPTER XV

TWO LETTERS

THE excitement over Valerie's return subsided at the end of ten days, and life at the Duval farm went on as usual. Captain Webb left to join Lieutenant Fielding farther north, and his absence made a great difference on the hill. Two new officers from the village came to occupy the two empty rooms, but they could in no way be said to fill the places of either of the original tenants.

Valerie and Pierre spent all their spare time with Lieutenant Carey, and gave him their undivided attention and thought. Valerie was completely recovered. The color was back in her cheeks, and she gained the pounds she had lost. With the return of her strength she began to fret at the inaction of the peaceful days. She had had one glimpse of the war, and it made her im-

patient to get back. There was not enough to do on the farm, and whenever she did find a task that satisfied her, soldiers seemed to spring from the ground to do it for her. But it is probable that she would have gone on, had not the advent of two letters on a sunshiny afternoon made a return to service possible.

Pierre had driven Valerie down to the postoffice in the donkey cart, more for the drive than from any real hope of letters. To their delight, however, the old postmistress handed them out two envelopes, one was addressed to Pierre and the other to Valerie. They opened them excitedly.

"Oh, how wonderful!" Valerie exclaimed. "That nice Monsieur Lathrop!" She looked up eagerly to see Pierre's face the picture of woe. "What is it?" she demanded.

"There has been an attack," he said slowly. "And my brave 'Shoulders' has been wounded. He is writing from the hospital."

"Oh!" the light left Valerie's face at once, "read me what he says," she begged.

"Very well," Pierre said. "Listen."

"*Dear Pierre, and all the rest of the folks on the hill:*

"You probably know by this time that we have at last gotten into the scrap. It was an accident, but that made it all the better. We were all working hard, one day, repairing a road. I was with Captain Webb, and we had a full company at work. I can't give names, it is not allowed, but we were between the German and English lines. Well, sir, before we knew it, we were right in the middle of a big attack.

"It was great. Our boys threw down their shovels, grabbed guns from the dead Boches, and for a while we had a pretty hot time. The English were certainly giving them a good chase, and we were sure glad to join in. I got a bullet in my head and a couple in my shoulder, but I'll be well again in no time. I'm very comfortable here in this hospital, but I'll have to be moving soon to a base; don't know where just yet. I will make a strong bid to stay in France, as my sad experience in crossing the ocean makes me dread the thought of the English Channel. (No, son, if you

are thinking of submarines you're way off. I was seasick, that's all.)

"Captain Webb was not hurt, I think, so I suppose he is back at work. He told me all about your sister's winning the Croix de Guerre, but I wasn't much surprised; I knew she had it in her. Please tell her for me that I think she is all right.

"My regard to all the folks.

"Your sincere friend,

"'SHOULDERS' FIELDING."

"P. S. If I get those bullets, after the doctor takes them out, I'll send them to you as I promised."

"Think of that!" Pierre exclaimed. "Is he not brave and fine? And what a fight it must have been—glorious, I call it!"

"Oh, Pierre, no!" Valerie protested. "No fight is glorious, I know, for I have been there and seen. It is all mud and noise and fire, terrible beyond words. I almost wish the big Lieutenant were so wounded that he could not return."

Pierre looked his disgust.

"You had better not tell him so; he is crazy to go back. Can't you hear from his letter?"

"Yes, I suppose so, and of course he is very brave," Valerie said slowly.

They got back into the cart and started for home. It was not until they were half-way up the hill that Valerie remembered her letter. Pierre drew her attention to it.

"It made you very happy," he said, "what is it?"

"I'll read it," Valerie replied. "It is from the head of a hospital at Fleurette, an American girl, who is a friend of Monsieur Lathrop. This is what she says:

"*Dear Miss Duval:*

"I have been hearing so much about you from Mr. Lathrop that I want to write and tell you how splendid I think you are, and to ask you if you would accept a position here in our hospital when you are well enough. Billy says you want to do something more, as if you hadn't done enough all ready, and I can't tell you how glad we'd be, here

at Fleurette, if you would come and help us. We are very short of nurses just now, so many of ours have gone out as ambulance drivers. You do not need any nurse's degrees to prove your worth. We know all about the hospital you organized in fifteen minutes in the dining-room of that old ruin where you lived. Billy said when you spoke English to him, he nearly died of joy; that is one of the reasons we most want you here,—you can speak English and French, and you have no idea how hard it is for us sometimes with our book French to get along. When the men spoke in any dialect we were lost. However, that is better now, for we have only officers who are getting well.

"We are too far away now, owing to the wonderful advance, to get any very serious cases. But I'll explain all that to you when you come, for you must come, we are depending upon you.

"Write me when to expect you. I hope it will be very soon.

"Very sincerely,

"Janet Brooks."

"Will you go?" Pierre demanded, when Valerie stopped reading.

"Of course I will," she replied. "It is what I have been hoping for. It is not as near the front as I had hoped, but if they need me, why of course I will go."

She spoke with a determination that made arguing useless, and later when Madame Duval read Miss Brooks' letter she did not attempt to dissuade her. In her heart she was relieved to know that Valerie would not be in the way of any danger, but she wisely refrained from mentioning her thoughts.

"When will you go, my dear?" Monsieur Duval asked without hesitation, when he heard the news.

"Just as soon as I can get ready," Valerie replied, "which should be in a day or two."

And the old gentleman nodded contentedly.

When a little later in the day Valerie and Pierre were alone together, Valerie said: "Are you going to answer Lieutenant Fielding's letter soon?"

"Certainly I am, and I am going to send him tobacco, too," Pierre replied.

They were leaning on the gate waiting for Lieutenant Carey and the men to come back. The sun was sinking behind the low hills to the west. Valerie watched it idly, and clicked one latch of the gate nervously.

"Why do you ask?" Pierre demanded. "Do you want to send him a message? It would be only polite of you, I think, to do it."

"I don't see why," Valerie replied. "I have nothing to say. I only asked out of curiosity, and because I thought—"

"You thought what?" Pierre insisted.

"Oh, that perhaps, as he said he wanted to remain in France until he was well, that you might suggest he ask to be sent to Fleurette," Valerie replied hurriedly.

"Good idea!" Pierre exclaimed, "I'll do that. If you were there, he would not be so lonely, perhaps. I'll write the letter this very night," he said with decision. "I do hope he can go."

"Look, isn't that the soldiers away across on the other hill?" Valerie asked, pointing. "What

a long, long hike they have had. They will be hungry for dinner, poor dears!" she added, smiling.

CHAPTER XVI

AT FLEURETTE

VALERIE stepped off the train at the tiny station at Fleurette, and looked about her. As the most prominent thing in sight was a big gray automobile, she saw that first. A girl with her hair down her back in a long braid was just getting out of it. Valerie watched her and waited shyly. The girl came towards her.

"Hello!" she exclaimed, "you're Valerie Duval, of course. I didn't get here a minute too soon, did I? Let me take your bag."

"Then you are Miss Brooks?" Valerie asked, smiling. "Oh, please don't trouble about the bag. I can manage it."

"No, I am not Miss Brooks," the girl replied. "I'm Helen Carey. Miss Brooks was so busy that she sent me."

"Helen Carey!" Valerie exclaimed.

"Oh, but that is the most exciting thing that I ever heard of. Only fancy, I left your big brother this morning!" she exclaimed in French.

"Hold on, I can't keep up with that," Helen laughed. "My French is very limited."

"Oh, how stupid, I am! In my excitement I forgot," Valerie apologized. "I am so sorry. What I said was, that I was glad, and that I had just left your brother this morning."

"My brother! Tom?" Helen exclaimed. "Why, of course, the Duval farm, I never connected the two names. You see Miss Brooks only told me to-day that you were coming. She was too busy to say who you were or where you came from, and I just got here this morning myself."

"But I thought you were in an English hospital, not a French one," Valerie said wonderingly.

"I was until to-day," Helen explained. "You see, some of our boys—Americans, I mean, may be sent to Fleurette for the time being and, well, I know it was like quitting, but I just couldn't help it. I asked to be transferred here, the head of the English hospital is a darling and, of course, she

let me come down. But for goodness' sake do tell me how Tom is, and let's get into the car."

In their excitement they had stood still on the platform.

"Do you drive it yourself?" Valerie asked, as Helen slipped into the driver's seat; "but of course you do, I was forgetting."

"Forgetting what?" Helen inquired.

"The night you drove to meet the train back in America," Valerie replied, smiling.

"Now, who told you that?" Helen demanded.

"Lieutenant Fielding."

"Why, do you know 'Shoulders'? Oh, that's right, he was billeted with Tom until he left to join the Engineers; and you know Allen too! isn't that thrilling! Why, it's a fairy tale," Helen exclaimed.

"Allen is Captain Webb, yes?" Valerie asked. "I knew him too. He did not get wounded in the battle, did he? And have you heard how Lieutenant Fielding is?"

The car was running smoothly along the dusty

road, but Helen brought it to a sudden stop. "Is?" she asked, "what do you mean,—is 'Shoulders' wounded?"

"Didn't you know?" Valerie inquired. "Oh, I am sorry I frightened you. He wrote to my brother Pierre and told him. It was after the attack when the Americans joined in, you know. He was shot, once in the head and twice in the arm, but he said he would soon be well."

"Thank goodness for that!" Helen said feelingly. "You did scare me. I haven't heard a word from Allen, even, for weeks, and 'Shoulders' never does write. And as for Tom, well, I've had one letter from him and two post-cards since I landed in France."

"He is very busy," Valerie explained. "He works all the time at something, but he talks about you a lot."

"Well, that doesn't help me," Helen laughed, as she started the car again.

They soon reached the gateway of the great Chateau that served now as a hospital, and drove

slowly up to the massive bronze door. Miss Brooks had heard the car coming, and was in the hall to receive them.

Valerie looked at her big, brown eyes for a second, and then exclaimed, "Then *you* are *her?*"

Helen and Miss Brooks laughed.

"Who's her?" Helen inquired.

"Why, the picture in Monsieur Lathrop's leather picture frame. He showed it to me, but he did not say you were in France, and he did not tell me your name."

Miss Brooks smiled delightedly. "I know, he told me he hadn't, and he is so anxious to know if you recognized me. Now I shall have to write him that you did straight off."

"How is he?" Valerie asked, "and has he gone back to America? He was badly wounded, poor fellow."

"No, indeed," Miss Brooks replied. "After the General gave him his Croix de Guerre they told him he was discharged from the service on account of his arm. But that didn't make any

difference to Billy. He just went over to Italy, and he's driving an ambulance there now."

"How exactly what he would do!" Valerie exclaimed.

She unbuttoned her dark blue coat and Helen caught sight of her decoration.

"Hello, have you a Croix de Guerre too?" she asked. "How thrilling!"

"Wait till you hear how she got it," Miss Brooks said. "I haven't had time to tell you. Miss Duval is a real heroine. She's done any amount of brave things, and she saved my Billy's life twice."

"Oh, that is nothing to Miss Carey," said Valerie. "She has saved lives, too. Now, please don't talk about me," she protested, as Helen started to speak. "I am so tired and dusty, may I go to my room?"

"Of course. Here's Marieken, she'll take you," Miss Brooks said, as a very thin little girl with big serious eyes and flaxen hair came into the hall. "Marieken, this is Mademoiselle Duval. Take her upstairs, will you? I'll stay behind and

tell Helen all about you," she added, as Valerie followed her guide up the stairs.

Marieken led the way up two long flights of stairs to a small room in one of the turrets. Valerie, as she followed, caught sight of long wards filled with rows of white cots. Everything looked so clean and comfortable that she could not help but contrast it with the discolored mattresses and the hard tables in the little estaminet at Riva.

"When they are first wounded they should have all this," she said to herself.

Marieken nodded in understanding. "Yes, you are right," she said. "But instead they must lie on straw in dark cellars—but that is war."

"Then you have seen too?" Valerie asked.

"Oh, yes," Marieken shrugged her shoulders, "I have seen enough to know."

Valerie noticed, for the first time, that the younger girl had a ribbon around her neck on which hung the Cross of St. Albert.

"How did you get it?" she asked curiously.

"For doing my duty, Mademoiselle," Marieken replied. "No more than that—and your Croix?"

"The same," Valerie replied; "for doing my duty to France."

They looked at each other for a long moment in silence. Although there was more than two years difference between them the expression of their eyes was the same.

"I am glad you have come," Marieken said at last.

"And I am glad you are here," Valerie replied. "The Americans are wonderful, but—"

"They cannot understand yet," Marieken finished, with another expressive shrug of her shoulders.

"Come now, let me help you unpack your bag, and then I will show you around."

Valerie had turned to look out of the window.

"It is a lovely place, isn't it? Are there many patients downstairs?"

"Not just now, no. A lot left yesterday to return—some home, and others to their regiments. We are expecting more to-morrow or the next day. The Americans, I believe."

Valerie felt her cheeks suddenly grow hot.

"Have you ever seen any Americans?" Marieken inquired, "soldiers, I mean."

"Oh, yes, plenty of them," Valerie told her. "We had three officers billeted at our house, and a lot of privates in the barn."

"And did you like them?" Marieken persisted.

"Yes, of course, they are so big and strong; you have no idea how big, why, when I first saw them I thought they must be giants," Valerie explained. "They are good fighters, I can imagine, and so calm, never excited or crazy, and so much fun."

"What are you two talking about?" Miss Brooks stood in the doorway, smiling. "I hate to interrupt, but I know Mademoiselle Duval must be hungry. Will you see if her luncheon is ready, Marieken?"

"Yes, indeed at once," Marieken replied. "I myself will cook it," she promised as she ran down the stairs.

"Mercy, you must have made a hit!" Helen exclaimed, as she joined Miss Brooks in the doorway. "Marieken is the best cook in seven states,

and if she makes you an omelet, you'll think you're in Paradise."

They returned downstairs, and Miss Brooks led the way into her office.

"I suppose you want to begin work to-morrow?" she asked, smiling.

"Why not to-day?" Valerie replied. "I'm not a bit tired."

"Good for you!" said Helen, "that's the proper spirit. But really there isn't much to do until the new men arrive."

"How about all those beds that have to be made?" Miss Brooks asked.

"Oh, I love to make beds, let's go do it now," Valerie exclaimed.

"Not before you have something to eat," Helen said. "Here comes Marieken now, and yes, she's made you an omelet."

CHAPTER XVII

NEWS OF CAPTAIN WEBB

THAT night Valerie met all the other nurses who had been on duty when she arrived, and was shown her new duties. They consisted chiefly in making beds and keeping an eye on a ward full of men, who were just at the stage of recovery when they needed all kinds of attention. Most of the men were French officers, and they were so delighted to find some one who could understand them, that it was not many minutes after Valerie had been put in charge before they began to imagine every possible want. They hid their cigarette cases and their magazines for an excuse to call her, and then grumbled like children when she could not sit by their beds and chat.

"But I am busy," she protested, as a little French Captain begged her to read to him the morning after her arrival. "More men may ar-

rive any time, and a nice fix we'd be in if their beds were not made."

"You have been making beds all morning," the Captain objected. "You must have made a thousand, now you should rest. If you don't do as I ask, I will tell the kind Mademoiselle Brooks."

"Tell her then," Valerie replied, laughing. "She will give you a great old scolding, see if she doesn't."

"What about Miss Brooks?" a voice asked from the doorway.

Valerie jumped up. "Monsieur le Capitaine insists that I read to him," she said. "Tell him I'm busy."

Miss Brooks took her part. "Of course you're busy. Captain you must read to yourself." "Mademoiselle Duval," she turned to Valerie, "do you know how to milk a cow?"

"Yes, certainly," Valerie replied. "Why?"

"Well, will you milk two of ours for us. Marieken's cousin, who was here until the other day, used to do it for us, but she left to work in the munition plant, and Miss Carey said she'd do it

but she has had such distressing news. Captain Webb is wounded and missing, she just received word, and of course she's upset."

"Oh, I am so sorry! Tell her not to worry," Valerie exclaimed. "I will milk the cows gladly. Where are they?"

"Come and I'll show you."

Miss Brooks turned and led the way to the barn. "We are so short of men that we have to do all the heavy work. When we had just plain soldiers they used to do lots of things for us, but of course one can't expect an officer to pitch hay or milk cows. I'd ask Marieken, only she has her hands full in the kitchen."

"But why can't I do it?" Valerie said. "I'm glad to have some real work. Up there it is just play."

"Wait till the new men arrive and you won't think so. You've come to us at a slack time, fortunately," Miss Brooks replied. "But don't worry—I can promise you work, hard work in a day or two."

The barn where the cows were kept was off a little distance from the Chateau. It was a picturesque building and had once been the stable, but a more recent owner of the Chateau had built a new garage, and the old one had been converted into a cow barn. There were four stalls on the main floor, and above them a loft for hay. At one corner, built on for no particular reason, was a tall turret. A steep ladder led to the top, which consisted of a tiny room with a window. On the outside the tower was covered with a very old trumpet vine, which added greatly to the picturesqueness of the building.

"What a funny old place," Valerie said delightedly. "I wouldn't wonder if it were older than the Chateau."

"It is queer, isn't it? What do you suppose they stuck that turret on for?" Miss Brooks asked.

"It was probably a windmill," Valerie explained; "and they couldn't bear to tear it down."

A little boy met them at the door. He was grinning sheepishly, and he held one hand behind him.

Valerie sniffed the air, but she did not say anything until Miss Brooks had left her with the parting instructions that she was to let Maurice help her carry the pails back to the house. Then she looked at the small grinning face before her and said with an attempt at great seriousness.

"Maurice, are you alone in this stable?"

"Yes, Mam'selle," the youngster replied.

"Then you've been trying to smoke," Valerie announced sternly. "Now don't deny it, I can smell the tobacco."

Maurice started to protest, looked at Valerie, and decided that honesty was the best policy.

"Only one little one, Mam'selle," he said coaxingly. "Please do not tell my mother or mam'selle Carey, for they will be cross."

"Where did you get the cigarette?" Valerie demanded, trying hard not to laugh, "and how long, if you please, have you been smoking?"

The boy saw the twinkle in her eye and grinned.

"Not for long, only to-day. You see the brave Captain LaTour was out on the lawn yesterday and he dropped a cigarette. It was very nearly a

new one, Mam'selle, he had only puffed twice, and then some nurse, the fat one that does not like smoke, came and the Captain threw it away. I found it and, this morning, as Mam'selle discovered I was trying to smoke it."

He had quite regained his cheerfulness by now. It was not possible to believe that any one with laughing eyes and short curly hair like his could ever be very angry.

"You're a young imp," Valerie said sternly, "and you must never, never do it again, do you understand? Boys don't smoke until they are much, much bigger than you are. If I catch you at it again, I'll spank you. I mean it—hard, too."

Maurice laughed. His expression was not promising, for he looked all of the contempt he felt for the threat of a mere girl.

Valerie set to work milking the cows. It was not hard for her, for although the Duvals were well off, she had always done her share of the work, especially since the beginning of the war. She had almost finished when Helen came into the

barn. Her eyes were red, but her mouth was set in strong determination.

"Here, let me finish," she said, "I'm all right and this is my work. I told Miss Brooks I'd do it; she should not have troubled you."

"It is not a trouble," protested Valerie. "I like it much better, in fact, than making beds. Please let me finish."

"No," Helen refused, "if I don't work I will go crazy."

Valerie gave her her place at once.

"Perhaps it is better," she said. "I am so sorry about Captain Webb. How did you hear?"

"The message came to the English hospital, and the doctor sent it here at once. The hospital is only a short distance from here, you know," Helen explained.

"But what did it say? Just wounded and missing?" Valerie asked gently.

"That's all," Helen replied, "just wounded and missing. But come, don't let's talk about it. I have my work to do, and that is more important than my troubles. I'm only realizing what your

country-women have been suffering for the last few years."

"You are splendid and brave," Valerie said, putting her arm on her shoulder.

"I'm an American!" Helen replied, "and I've got to keep a stiff upper lip."

"Perhaps he may be found," Valerie suggested.

"No, no, don't let me get my hopes up," Helen pleaded. "I couldn't stand it. I've worked it all out, and now I can go on, but I don't dare hope."

Valerie nodded in understanding, but she hoped none the less. She could not forget the sure way in which Lieutenant Fielding had written to Pierre of Captain Webb's safety, but she did not tell Helen of it for fear of raising her hopes unnecessarily. Instead she said: "Don't think about it at all. You must let me help you now with this milk. I'll take it to the kitchen. Come along, Imp," this to Maurice, who was lying contentedly in the hay, "help me carry this pail."

"Will you give me a mug full when we get to the kitchen?" Maurice asked as they steadied the pail between them.

"If you promise never to smoke again," Valerie said.

Maurice sighed, but whether in sympathy for himself or disgust at her suggestion Valerie did not know.

"I won't promise, Mam'selle," he said decidedly.

"All right then, no milk." Valerie was equally decided.

They reached the door to the kitchen in silence, and Marieken met them. "Here give me a pail, quick. It is time to take up the egg nogs, and those big children upstairs will be crying if they don't get them in a hurry."

"Can I help?" Valerie offered, "I can beat up the eggs."

"No, I will do that. You come over here," Marieken directed. "There are the glasses and here is the tray. In that box are a few crackers. Give them just one apiece, and if the little Captain grumbles and he will, of course, he is always hungry, that man, tell him he will have no broth this afternoon."

Valerie watched Marieken fly around the big kitchen like an excited butterfly, and wondered how any one so very small could hold so much energy. She busied herself with the glasses, and they were no more than in place on the tray, when Marieken came over with a foaming pitcher of egg nogg.

"Shall I carry them up?" Valerie offered.

"No, indeed, they go by elevator; look," Marieken laughed, as she opened a door in the wall and lifted the tray on to the dumb waiter. Before she sent it up to the floor above, she took off one of the glasses.

"Did I put on too many?" Valerie asked.

"No, but I made one extra for Mam'selle Carey. I will take it out to her. She is very unhappy, and no wonder; such sad news."

"I can't tell her in English how I feel, and she cannot understand my French, so this will have to show her for me." She picked up the glass and hurried out towards the barn.

Valerie turned to go upstairs, but before she reached the door, she heard an impish chuckle from

one corner of the kitchen. Maurice was sitting, Turk fashion, on the floor and contentedly sipping a large bowl of milk.

CHAPTER XVIII

WAITING FOR THE AMBULANCES

"WELL, our boys arrive this afternoon," Miss Brooks announced at breakfast the next morning. "I received word late last night. Thirty new patients, just think, we will have some Americans all to ourselves. I hope at sight of them, I won't lose my head and insist on kissing them. I'll want to, goodness knows!"

"Are they all Americans?" Valerie asked eagerly. It did seem that out of so many at least one might be Lieutenant Fielding.

"No indeed. There are a lot of your countrymen coming, too," Miss Brooks replied. "But they are coming from another clearing station."

"How do they bring the men down here?" Valerie inquired. "Not all the way in an ambulance, that would kill them." She spoke feelingly. Her

experience in an ambulance was anything but a restful memory.

"They bring them down in a train," Miss Brooks explained; "hospital trains from the clearing station to our Junction, that's twenty miles from here, and from there by ambulances. The roads are nice and level along here, you know."

"Have you any idea who are coming?" one of the nurses asked. "Of course, they didn't send any names."

"No, but of course, they're all men from the Engineers, for they are the only Americans who have been wounded so far."

"What time did you say they were coming?" Helen asked listlessly.

"Sometime this afternoon. There's no telling when—the trains are so late."

Helen nodded and left the table abruptly, and after a few minutes Valerie followed her. She found her pitching hay from the loft of the cow barn. Valerie did not speak to her, for she knew she wanted to be alone. She returned to the

Chateau, and went up to the ward to relieve the nurse on duty. There was very little to do, for everything was in perfect order.

One of the doctors on the hospital staff came in to make his rounds. Valerie stood respectfully at the foot of each bed as he read the charts. He was a gruff old Frenchman, and the men all disliked him. Marieken was the only one of all the girls and women that made up the staff of the hospital, to whom he ever bothered to speak.

He passed down the ward, and growled out a direction here and there, and before he left he said abruptly: "Get them all out of doors into the sun. It's as warm as summer to-day."

Valerie nodded respectfully. "Very well, sir," she said.

As soon as his head was turned the men all laughed.

"Old sober sides!" the little Captain exclaimed, making a wry face. "He always sends my temperature up to look at him. I much prefer the young American doctor."

"That's because he lets you smoke all day,"

Valerie said severely, and the rest of the men laughed.

She hurried to tell Miss Brooks the doctor's orders, and the morning was filled up by putting out the chairs on the lawn and settling the men in them.

Valerie was a little bit tired and very hot by the time luncheon was being carried to them, and she slipped off down the road under the big shade trees. She had wandered as far as the gate when she heard the sound of an automobile.

"An ambulance," was the first thought that entered her mind, and she ran excitedly to the gate.

She was disappointed to find only a big green car coming in sight down the road. She waited and watched it. It was a military car, and it was going very fast. As it reached the gate, it stopped and an officer jumped down from his place beside the driver.

"This is Fleurette, isn't it?" he asked Valerie.

"Yes, Monsieur," she answered.

"Well is there a Miss Helen Carey here? I have a message for her."

"Oh, yes, sir," Valerie exclaimed, "shall I take it to her?"

"Yes, if you will. Tell her that Dr. Jepson sent it to her by me, will you?"

"Yes, certainly," Valerie's eyes were shining with excitement. "Is it about Captain Webb?" she asked as she took the envelope.

"Can't say," the Englishman replied, "I was passing this way and the doctor asked me to leave it. If you'll take it to her it will save time, and I'm in no end of a hurry," he said as he went back to his car. "It's good news, I think," he called back over his shoulder.

"Oh, then it *is* about Captain Webb!" Valerie exclaimed joyfully, and started running as fast as she could.

She found Helen in the cow shed. She was busy washing out the milk pails; Maurice was helping her. She looked up at sight of Valerie dashing towards her.

"Are they coming?" she called.

"No, no, it's news for you—good news," Valerie shouted back breathless from her run.

"Here," she flourished the envelope, "it came from Dr. Jepson, an Englishman brought it."

Helen seized it, tore it open with trembling fingers, and read:

"Captain Webb slightly wounded, leaves for base hospital to-day."

"Oh, what does it mean?" she exclaimed. "Is this one true or was it sent before the other."

"Of course it's true," Valerie insisted. "The other was a mistake. If he was found once and in a hospital, he wouldn't get lost again."

Helen stared ahead of her. A thousand fears rushed into her mind, and she tried not to put too much faith in the words before her, but her heart was beating excitedly. Valerie had no doubts at all. She threw her arms around Helen and kissed her on both cheeks.

"He is coming here, I know it!" she exclaimed. "Here this very day. Stop torturing your mind with doubts, it's all as plain as black and white," she insisted.

"Allen, here! Oh, that's too good to be true!"

Helen exclaimed, trembling. "Why, I believe I'm going to cry. How silly of me!"

"It is not silly," Valerie denied hotly. "You are human—cry hard, it will do you good," she said with so much emphasis that Helen laughed instead.

"I think you understand," she said; "but don't tell, will you? I think tears are silly, but I can't somehow help myself just now."

"Oh, there is the luncheon gong!" Valerie exclaimed, as a bell sounded from the house. "I have been away too long, I ought to be ashamed. Come now, dry your eyes and try to eat something."

Helen did as she was told with some success, considering her state of excitement.

All the nurses and the doctors were delighted at her good news. An engaged girl is an interesting subject at any time, but in the midst of war, with its dangers and suspense she is more so than ever. Each of the nurses treated her with so much sympathy and consideration, as one set aside by fate for special notice, that she became very

much embarrassed and fled out-of-doors with Valerie to escape it.

"They're darlings, of course, but I wish they wouldn't," she said ruefully.

"I know it makes your cheeks burn, doesn't it?" Valerie sympathized. "Let's stay out here. There is plenty to do in the stable, and we must put a long table somewhere, so that the drivers from the ambulances can be fed when they arrive."

They worked steadily for a couple of hours or more, and then Helen began listening for the ambulances. She would run down the driveway at every sound, only to return to say that the car had passed by the gate.

At last, however, they did come. They heard them from a long distance, and caught sight of them away down the road, a train of ten machines. Every one in the Chateau was waiting in the courtyard for them when they stopped.

"Americans?" Helen asked, as the first driver and aid jumped out.

"No, nothing but French," he replied, "the train from the north isn't in yet."

"Oh!" Helen's face fell, but she was soon as busy as the rest making their new patients comfortable. They were officers from French regiments that had been under heavy fire, and some of them had been very badly wounded. Their courage and pluck, and their pathetic gratitude for the smallest thing that was done for them, made the nurses ashamed of their momentary disappointment, and they redoubled their attentions.

It was not long before all the men were in bed with lighted cigarettes between their lips. The old patients, who were well enough to be up and around, came into the ward, and news of the front and of comrades was soon bandied back and forth from bed to bed.

Valerie and Helen, as soon as they had done all that they could—and Valerie had been of the greatest help as an interpreter—returned to the road to await the next train of ambulances.

"If they don't come pretty soon I shall give

up," Helen said. "This waiting is terrible."

"Well, they will be here soon, if they are coming at all," Valerie replied, "for it is almost time for the sun to set."

They walked towards the stable. The ambulances that had brought the French men were about to return. Their drivers, some of them girls, had eaten a hurried meal and seemed eager to start.

"We can make it before dark if we hustle a bit," Helen heard one of them say.

"Do you think the Americans will get here by to-night?" Helen asked her.

The girl turned. "Not a doubt of it," she said. "If we pass them on the road we'll tell them to hurry up."

"Thanks, I wish you would," Helen said smiling, and turned to Valerie. "I'm going up and find something to do," she said. "If you hear them, let me know, will you?"

Valerie agreed, and when Helen had gone she strolled off towards the cow barn.

"If I could get up to the top of that tower, I

could see a long way off," she thought. "I guess I'll try it."

The door was open into the barn, and she went in and looked at the long ladder that led up to the tower. It was steep, but Valerie did not hesitate to start up it. She was so occupied with the idea, that in carrying it out she did not notice that Maurice was hiding under the hay by one of the cows, nor did she even notice the telltale smell of tobacco in the air.

She climbed slowly at first, testing the strength of each rung before she put her foot on it, but by the time she was half-way up she decided that it was safe, and hurried the rest of the way.

The little room at the top was no more than a very broad shelf, but it was quite wide enough to sit on. Valerie, after an effort, managed to push open the window. There was a splendid view of the countryside, as she expected. She scanned the road below eagerly, and to her joy saw a train of ambulances not very far away. She watched them come nearer and nearer, and at last she could hear the rumble of the cars.

Helen came out of the Chateau, and Valerie called to her: "Here they come, I can see them!"

Helen looked up in surprise. "Where are you?" she called.

"Here in the tower. I have a fine view. Listen, do you hear them? They are nearly at the gate."

But Helen was not listening—she was gazing horror-striken at the barn before her. Valerie leaned out of the window and looked down. As she did so, Maurice's piping voice came to her.

"Fire! Fire! Oh, help, the hay is on fire!" he screamed shrilly.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RESCUE

VALERIE started down the ladder, but was forced by a cloud of smoke that filled the tower to return to the window.

Miss Brooks and several of the nurses had heard Maurice's cry, and came hurrying out to see what the matter was. Helen was busy trying to attach the garden hose to the pipe beside the stable. She succeeded only to find that it was too short.

Meanwhile the ambulances began to arrive. The first one pulled up in the courtyard, and the driver jumped to the ground and hurried over to Miss Brooks, who was wringing her hands. Without waiting to hear what the trouble was, he plunged into the smoke and flames and returned with two cows, both very frightened and badly burned.

Another ambulance arrived, as Miss Brooks and

Helen were explaining frantically about Valerie. The driver of that one joined the group. The flames were climbing higher every minute. The men looked up at the window so far beyond their reached and remained helpless.

There were shouts of "A ladder! Somebody get a ladder!"

"There's one in the stable."

"Here!"

"Quick!"

But no one seemed to do anything.

Valerie looked down the tower again. The ladder had caught, and the flames were lapping at the dry wooden rungs. The smoke was overpowering. She went back to the window and leaned far out to try to escape it. As she looked down in the courtyard, she saw the back of the second ambulance open, and a man jump out. He was very big, and his head and one arm were swathed in bandages.

Valerie saw Helen run to him, and point up at the window. He looked up. It was Lieutenant Fielding, without a doubt. She watched terrified,

for he brushed Helen aside and ran over to the tower.

"Don't! Don't!" she shouted, as he caught hold of the big trunk of the trumpet vine and began to climb up.

She shut her eyes, for the smoke was stinging them, and her head reeled dizzily. There was a tense silence in the courtyard, and the only sound was the crackle of the flames as they crept up the ladder below.

Valerie tried once to open her eyes, but she was nearly overcome by the smoke. She did manage to see that the white of the bandages was coming nearer and nearer, then she fainted.

Lieutenant Fielding climbed higher and higher, the old trumpet vine held firmly, and at last he reached the window.

He had only one arm, and he could not let go of the vine long enough to get Valerie on his back. She was powerless to help him. His only chance was to rouse her.

"Valerie!" he called, "come to, child, you're all right. I'm here, please open your eyes."

Valerie was dimly conscious of his voice and tried to struggle back to consciousness. She opened her eyes and tried to speak. "Shoulders" saw it.

"That's right, honey, come to, like a good girl, and try to catch hold of my neck. I've only this one arm," he added beseechingly, for the smoke was growing denser every minute.

Valerie roused herself with an effort, and did what he told her. She clung tightly to his neck and crawled out of the window.

"On my back; there," "Shoulders" directed. "Don't be frightened—we'll be down soon."

He began the descent slowly, for her weight added to his weakened condition and made it a hard task. As they neared the ground a dozen hands were held up to help them, and a cheer of relief, as well as admiration, rose from the men who were watching. And not a moment too soon, for as they reached ground the whole tower burst into flames.

Helen and Miss Brooks received Valerie and carried her into the Chateau, while the doctor took

care of "Shoulders," who was very nearly unconscious himself from the exertion.

Valerie was not seriously affected by the smoke, and under Miss Brooks' care she soon regained consciousness.

"Is he safe?" was her first question.

"Yes, dear, he is. The doctors are taking care of him, don't worry," Miss Brooks replied.

"Oh, what a scare!" Helen said excitedly. "Whatever made you go up into the tower? I thought those men would never do anything. You would had been burned to death, if it hadn't been for 'Shoulders.'"

"Don't excite her, my dear," Miss Brooks protested, "she ought to be quiet."

But Valerie was thinking of too many things to make rest possible.

"Did he come?" she demanded, looking at Helen. Then without giving her time to answer, she said accusingly, "You don't know. Go downstairs this minute and find out."

Helen rose. "All right, I will," she said, "and I'll come back and tell you."

"Good!" Valerie turned to Miss Brooks, "and you, please, go and see how Lieutenant Fielding is," she begged, "I can't be quiet until I know."

Miss Brooks nodded. "Very well, but you mustn't fret while I'm gone. Do lie still."

Valerie was tossing about nervously. "I will, I will, if you'll only hurry," she promised.

Helen and Miss Brooks had hardly left the room, when there was a slight knock on the door.

"Come in," Valerie called, and Marieken entered softly.

"The doctor says you are to drink this, and when he has time he will come to see you. The big man that rescued you is very ill."

"How do you know?" Valerie demanded.

"Because I saw him. The wound in his head is all open again, and his eyes look as if he were in agony," Marieken explained. Then quite as an afterthought she added, "I think he is the biggest and, yes, the bravest man I ever saw."

"Oh, he is, he is!" Valerie cried. "And now maybe just on my account he is going to die."

"He is not. I heard the doctor say he was too strong to kill. Here now stop being so silly and drink this, it will make you better, and then you may get up. All the men are here and there is much to do."

Without a word of protest Valerie swallowed the medicine. The little Belgian's rebuke acted as a tonic to her overstrung nerves, and helped her back to self-control as no amount of petting could have done.

"Now go to sleep," Marieken said sternly, going out and closing the door behind her.

And Valerie went to sleep and slept for three hours. Miss Brooks and Helen tiptoed into her room several times, and at last the doctor came. He made so much noise coming up the stairs, that Valerie woke up. It was the gruff Frenchman and he had very little to say. He left Valerie with the determination to recover at once, rather than have him come back again to see her.

At last Helen opened the door.

"Are you awake?" she whispered.

"Oh, yes, do come in quickly and tell me," Valerie exclaimed. "But, of course, I can see by your face that Captain Webb is here."

"Yes, and he's not very badly wounded, but he was missing for two whole days—think of it—before the stretcher-bearers found him. Of course, he's awfully weak, but he'll be well soon —too soon, I suppose."

"And Lieutenant Fielding?" Valerie asked.

"Oh, don't worry about 'Shoulders,'" Helen laughed. "He's all right. Of course, climbing a wall and rescuing pretty little French girls when you've only one arm is hard work, but he'll get well in no time."

Valerie rolled over so that she faced the wall.

"You may joke if you like," she said crossly, "but I don't think it's a joking matter."

"Why, you funny little thing, you!" Helen soothed. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. There, cuddle up and go to sleep, so that you'll be all well to-morrow and can go down and see 'Shoulders.' He's been asking about you all evening," she said as she turned out the light.

Valerie did not reply, and Helen left her wondering a little, but she was very far from even guessing at the meaning of her silence.

CHAPTER XX

A THANKSGIVING IN FRANCE

A BIG fire blazed in the fireplace of the drawing-room of the Chateau, and as many men as there was space for gathered before it and smoked contentedly. A month had passed since Valerie's narrow escape, and it had been a month of crowded busy days.

Lieutenant Fielding had been sick for a long time, and there had been nights when the doctors and nurses had looked grave and worried as they left his bedside.

Valerie, wide-eyed and frightened, had waited outside the door hour on hour to hear news of his condition, and each day seemed to make her grow perceptibly older. But the American doctor had been right, "Shoulders" was too strong to die, and at the end of two weeks he began to show signs of

improvement, and to demand food. The nurses smiled when they left him, and the doctors shook their heads and chuckled.

When he was moved back to his place in the ward, he received a loud and hearty welcome. The French officers came to see him, and tried to talk, gave it up, and went back to their ward.

The phonograph was kept going all day, until the few old records were almost used up, then there had arrived a box from London for Helen Carey, and in it were no less than thirty brand-new records, of all the popular songs and marches. Alice Blythe had sent them over as a contribution of cheer to Fleurette. The men who could not squeeze in before the fire were busy at the other end of the long room trying the new records. There was a holiday atmosphere about the whole Chateau, and the French officers were as delighted as children.

"Tell me," one of them said to Captain Webb, "what day do you call this?"

"Thanksgiving," the Captain explained. "It's an American holiday pure and simple. Our fore-

fathers started it as a sort of day of thanks for good crops."

"It is a beautiful idea," the Frenchman replied, "to set apart one day on which to eat turkey and numberless other delicious foods."

"Turkey!" "Shoulders" demanded. "Who said so?"

"I did, Monsieur," the Frenchman replied. "Did you not smell a delicious smell as you came down the stairs?"

"Sure, but food, any kind, or I should say most kinds of food are a delicious smell to me," "Shoulders" replied.

"Ah, that is where you are wrong. Some food is good, but it is seldom that it is truly delicious," the Frenchman corrected him.

"You don't say. Well, how did you come to discover that that particular delicious smell was turkey?" "Shoulders" demanded.

"I warn you," Captain Webb laughed, "if you're not sure that there is turkey, you'd better not say anything, because 'Shoulders' is apt to be real put out if you're wrong.

"But, of course, I know for a surety that it *is* turkey. Listen, I tell you how. I came down the stairs—you see—about the fifth step I sniff, and I say 'ha, ha' that is the first delicious smell I have sniffed since I leave Paris. I go down the stairs, but when I come to the door of the kitchen I stop. The smell is—how you say—worse?"

"No, stronger," several voices corrected.

"Very well, more stronger, so I push open the door a crack, and then I see down the steps straight to the big stove, and at the stove is the little Marieken dancing."

"Dancing?" his listeners demanded.

"Yes, jumping about so excited, while two big women hold a big, oh, a very big pan between them, and on it is a turkey of great proportion, and the little Marieken stab him with a fork and squeal with delight."

The Americans all sat back in their chairs, and sighed with profound and blissful content, and those of the French who had understood laughed in appreciation.

"Say, Captain Hilaire," "Shoulders" turned to the narrator, "I reckon if you've made a mistake, you'd better start for Germany right now."

"Oh, you are so droll," Captain Hilaire replied, laughing, "to care so much for a turkey."

"I can see Helen's hand in this," Captain Webb said mysteriously.

"Oh, you can see Missy's hand in everything," "Shoulders" replied, "but maybe this time you're right."

"I don't care whose hand it was," another American laughed, "if it's a real turkey. Hello, here's little Miss Duval," he added as Valerie, looking very pretty in a simple white serge dress, hesitated in the doorway.

"Come in, Mademoiselle," Captain Hilaire called.

"What is the matter, have you broken the phonograph?" Valerie asked, smiling, "I haven't heard it for ten minutes."

"No, but we had a weightier subject to discuss," Captain Webb told her, "you can settle it

for us. Captain Hilaire here thinks he saw Marieken dancing around a turkey, and we're inclined to think he's dreaming."

"Am I not right, Mademoiselle?" Captain Hilaire asked.

"Oh, but you have given away a great secret," Valerie replied in French. In English, she said: "He must have been dreaming, indeed Captain. I have seen no turkeys flying about Fleurette. I think we are going to have mutton stew for dinner," she teased. "Perhaps he confused the two," she turned and left the room hurriedly.

"Shoulders" was after her in an instant.

"I'll make sure about this while I'm at it," he drawled as he followed her.

Valerie ran as fast as she could down the hall and into Miss Brooks' office, through a long French window, and out on to a tiny balcony.

She tried to hide against the wall, but a telltale bit of her skirt blew into sight of the window and "Shoulders" was soon beside her.

"Hello, butterfly!" he said, grinning broadly.

"I knew I'd catch you, if I just waited for my chance, and now that I've got you, you're going to listen to me—understand—even if the turkey gets cold in the meantime."

"Oh, it is an hour before dinner," Valerie teased, "and we will get cold out here in this wind long before then. What must I listen to?"

"Well," "Shoulders" shifted from one foot to the other, "suppose we begin with question number one. How old are you?"

"Why, I will be seventeen in a little while," Valerie answered evasively.

"Then you're sixteen now. That's awfully young," "Shoulders" looked genuinely troubled, "but it can't be helped, I can't wait until you really grow up."

"Wait, what for?" Valerie demanded.

"Shoulders" stirred uneasily, and looked out over the smooth lawn.

"Let's take a walk," he suggested, "I can always talk better when I walk, and it's not cold a bit."

"But you have no hat," Valerie protested, "and you know Miss Brooks would be angry."

"Not to-day," "Shoulders" replied, "she'd never be angry on Thanksgiving, she's much too nice. Anyway I figure that if we're careful we can keep out of sight."

He swung himself to the ground and lifted Valerie down very gently. They walked quickly around towards the back of the house. The cow barn was now a picturesque ruin. Only a part of the tower was left, and it stood out clearly against the bank of white clouds in the November sky.

"Shoulders" did not speak until they were standing in its shadows, and out of sight of the hospital.

"Now I guess we're about ready for question number two," he said.

"Which is?" Valerie looked up at him inquiringly.

"Which is, are you, or were you, very fond of that ambulance driver?"

"Monsieur Lathrop? Why, of course I was.

He is a dear," Valerie replied enthusiastically, "he is the kindest man I—"

"Yes, I know," "Shoulders" interrupted, "but apart from that are you—well, you know, in love with him?"

"Certainly not. What a stupid question," Valerie protested. "Why should I be?"

"Well, you saved his life, you know," "Shoulders" reminded her, "and I kind of thought—"

Valerie wheeled around and faced him squarely. "Did Helen fall in love with you, just because she saved your life?" she demanded. "Monsieur Lathop is going to marry Miss Brooks, and I am very happy every time I think of it."

"Well, so much for that," "Shoulders" replied, and then forgetting his bashfulness, he swept her suddenly off her feet and held her tight in his arms. "I guess it doesn't matter much anyway," he said gently. "The main thing is—I love you, dear, and I want you to love me. You're nothing but a baby, but I'll wait till you grow up, and then—well, I want to take care of you, and—"

"Keep me from burning up in cow barns," Valerie finished for him, and her voice was very soft as she added: "Oh, my big giant if you only will!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE TURKEY

THE great gong of the Chateau that rang for meals boomed out in the crisp air. "Shoulders" looked in the direction from which the sound came with an expression of anger and disgust.

"That's the first time I ever heard a call to eat when it wasn't welcome," he said ruefully. "I thought you told me we had a long time."

Valerie smiled delightedly. "You are forgetting that turkey," she said. "Let's hurry up or it will be all gone before we get there, with so many hungry Americans to eat it."

They ran back as fast as they could, and the color in their cheeks, and the way Valerie's hair was blown about might have aroused a just suspicion that they had just come in from out of doors, had any one bothered to give them more

than a glance. But every one was too busy finding his place at the long table that reached from one end of the dining-hall to the other.

Miss Brooks, Helen, Captain Webb, "Shoulders," Valerie, and several other Americans were at one end of it.

"I hope it's the turkey end," "Shoulders" said.

"It is," Miss Brooks replied, "but if you sit next to the turkey you are served last."

"Then I guess I'll be leaving for the other end. There's a place down there by Marieken that some one's overlooked," "Shoulders" laughed.

"Oh, that's for the doctor. We put him beside her because they get along so beautifully, though it is kind of hard on poor little Marieken."

"Hard? I don't believe, when you think of what that youngster's done, that there's any task in the world too difficult for her," Helen laughed, —"even taming cross doctors. I never can help wondering when I look at that great cross she wears, and then at her thin little shoulders."

"I know it's hard to believe all that Captain

Blythe told us, isn't it?" Miss Brooks replied; "and oh, that reminds me, I heard from Billy this week, and he tells me that he is learning to eat spaghetti like a true Italian, and that a little Italian girl who lives up in Verona, who is—let's see if I can remember the funny way he put it—oh, yes. 'Who is—with apologies to your magazine of child wonders—always excepting little curly-haired Valerie, bless her—the real article. Her name is Lucia Rudini, and some day I'll make your hair stand on end telling you about her. She's some child!' "

"How exciting," Helen said. "I think he was mean to leave us in suspense. Why didn't he write more?"

"Oh, he's awfully busy, poor boy," Miss Brooks explained. "And he is so enthusiastic over the plucky little Italians."

"Did he say anything about how things were going along their front?" Captain Webb asked.

"No, Billy's always vague, but he tells me the war will last only three years more," Miss Brooks replied.

Under cover of the noise "Shoulders" leaned over to Valerie.

"Can you grow up in that time, do you think?"

"For you, yes," she replied very softly.

"The turkey! He is come!" Captain Hilaire exclaimed from the other end of the table. "I tell you, I see him and I was right, just see how fat he is! Three cheers for the American day, Thanksgiving!"

THE END

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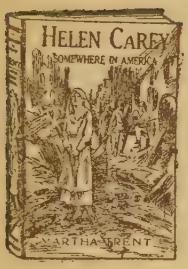

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